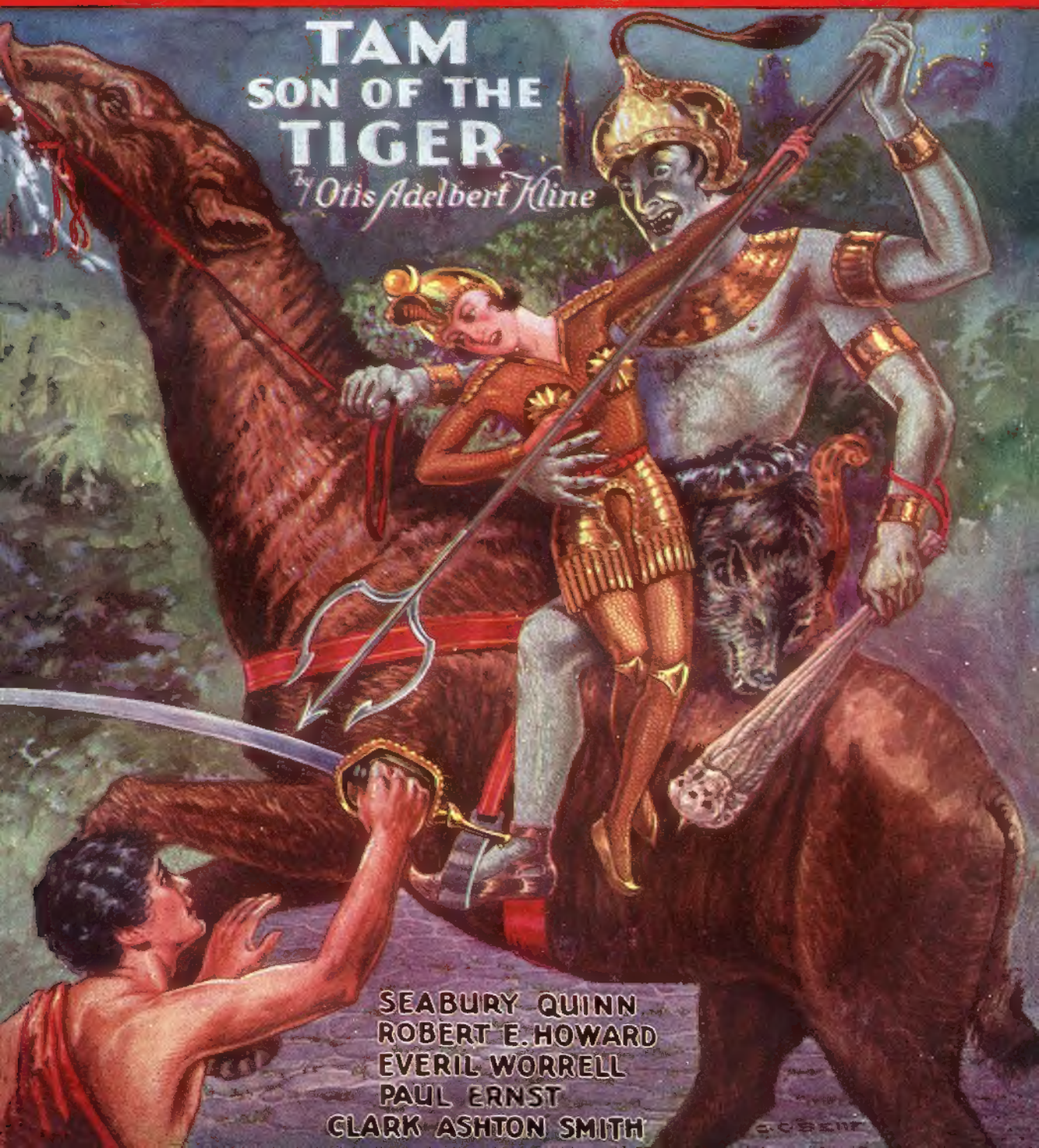
Weird Tales

SEPT. 1931

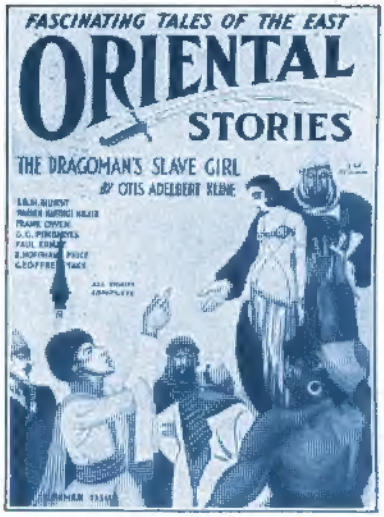
The Unique Magazine

25¢ 30c IN CANADA



The Dragoman's Slave Girl

By Otis Adelbert Kline



I STOOD there in the slave mart, idly looking on while they auctioned off girls and women, tall and short, young and old, fat and thin, willing and unwilling. There were slant-eyed, golden-skinned girls from Cathay, supple, brown-skinned nautch-girls from Hind, Nubian maids and matrons whose bodies were like polished ebony, and Abyssinians of the color of coffee. Then came the Circassians, Armenians, Persians, Nestorians and Yezidees, some quite good to look upon. But none interested me.

I turned to go, when suddenly I heard a chorus of "Oh's!" and "Ah's!" from the entire assembly. Looking back toward the auction block, I was smitten with admiration for the witching vision of feminine loveliness that stood thereon. Then scarcely knowing what impelled me to do so, I elbowed and jostled my way to a position just in front of the platform, and stood like the others, gaping up at the wondrous frail creature who, standing there beside her auctioneer was as a gazelle beside an overgrown wart hog. Nor had Almighty Allah ever before vouchsafed me the privilege of beholding such grace and beauty.

Her eyes were large and brown, and their sleepy lids and lashes were kohled with Babylonian witchery. Her mouth was like the red seal of Suleiman Baalshem, Lord of the Name, on whom be peace, and her smile revealed teeth that were matched pearls. The rondure of her firm young breasts, strutting from her white bosom beneath the glittering beaded shields, was as that of twin pomegranates. And her slender waist swayed with the grace of a branchlet of basil, above her rounded hips.

The flat-nosed, red-bearded auctioneer, after clumsily describing the charms of her whose beauty defied description, called for bids. I had but a hundred sequins, but this girl was worth thousands—

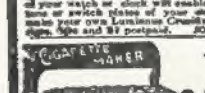
The swift-moving sequence of events that followed when Hamed the Attar, who tells this story, dared to bid against the Pasha for the slave girl make a thrilling story that will hold you spellbound. Read this and other thrilling stories by such authors as Warren Hastings Miller, S. B. H. Hurst, Paul Ernst, Frank Owen, G. G. Pendarves, E. Hoffmann Price, Geoffrey Vace and others in the current issue of

ORIENTAL STORIES

Ask Your Newsdealer

LUMINOUS PAINT

Make Your Watches, Clocks, Etc., Visible by Night The very latest discovery in the scientific world. Hitherto, unknown substance, which, after a long and costly search, we have at last secured the exclusive right to use in our LUMINOUS PAINT, which appears to the eyes of any article, quite gone, at white light, making it perfectly visible in the dark. THE DARKER THE NIGHT, THE MORE BRIGHT, LIGHT IT SHINES. Quite simple to use. Anyone can do it. A little applied to the dial of your watch or clock will enable you to tell the time by night. You can coat the push button or switch plates of your electric lights, match boxes, and innumerable other articles, make your own Luminous Crucifixes, Luminous Rosaries, Beads, etc. Price 25c, 3 for 60c. Large size, 50c and $1 postpaid. JOHNSON SMITH & CO., Dept. 980, RACINE, WIS.



CIGARETTE MAKER

Roll your own and save money. Better and quicker; cigs more than half. Use your favorite brand of tobacco. Neat, useful, handy. Fits also, weighs 1½ oz. Made entirely of metal, like of plated. 25c, 3 for 60c postpaid anywhere.

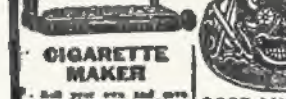
GOOD LUCK RING

Very striking, unique and uncommon. Silver finish, skull and symmetrical design, two brilliant, flashing gems in the eyes. Said to bring good luck. Order 25c postpaid.

Exploding Cigarettes

JUST LIKE ORDINARY CIGARETTES, BUT SUCH REAL STARTLERS! The box contains ten genuine cigarettes of excellent quality. They appear so real, but when each cigarette is about smoked-smoked, the victim gets a very great surprise as it goes off with a loud BANG! A great sleigh prankster not quite harmless. Price 25c box.

NOVELTY BADGES



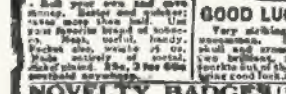
Rinder Permit 10c — Center Inspector 10c

Very very novel metal badges, similar photos that you can wear, prove you for one of all properties as for other people, and then, each badge, 2 for 15c, or 15c per box, postpaid anywhere.

SURPRISE MATCHES

More fun than fighting with your wife. Look just like ordinary matches. Put up in boxes just like regular Safety Matches. As the victim tries to light one he gets quite a surprise. Price 12c per box, 3 boxes for 25c, 12 for 75 cents. 10c

MIDGET BIBLE



GREAT CURIOSITY! Smallest Bible in the world. Size of a quarter, 1½ x 1½ in. 210 Pages. Said to bring good luck to the owner. A genuine work of art. Must be seen to be appreciated. Make good money selling them to friends, sweetheart, etc. PRICE 15c each, 3 for 40c, 12 for $1.00, 100 for $7.50. Also obtainable in Leather Binding, with gold edges. Price 50c each, 12 for $1.25, 24 for $2.50 per dozen. Magnifying Glass for use with Midget Bible, 15c.

INVISIBLE INK

The most consummate secrecy can be written with this ink, for the writing makes no mark. Cannot be seen unless you know the secret. Invaluable for many reasons. Keep your parents and other persons uncomfortable away from prying eyes. Great fun for playing practical jokes.

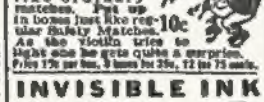
Only 15c a Bottle; 3 for 40c.

JOHNSON SMITH & CO.

STAGE MONEY

Withabunch of these bills, it is easy for each person of limited means to appear prosperous by flashing a roll of these bills at the proper time and peeling off a genuine bill or two from the outside of the roll, the effect created will be found to be all that can be desired. Prices, postpaid: 40 Bills 20c, 120 for 50c, or $1.50 thousand postpaid.

Wonderful X-Ray Tube



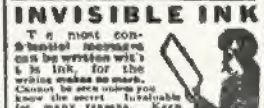
A wonderful little instrument producing optical illusions both surprising and entertaining. With it you can see what is apparently the bones of your fingers, the bone in a fowl pouch, the interior opening in a pipe stem, and many other similar illusions. A mystery that no one has been able to satisfactorily explain. Price 10c, 3 for 25c, 12 for 75c, 100 for $5. Postpaid.

MAGIC NOSE FLUTE

Post Paid 10c

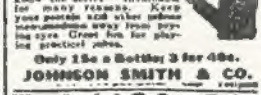
The Magic Nose Flute, or Harmonicone, is a unique and liquid musical instrument that is played with nose and mouth combined. It is just a little knack in playing it which, when once acquired, after a little practice, will enable you to produce very sweet music that somewhat resembles a flute. There is no fingering, and once you have mastered it you can play all kinds of music with feeling and ease. When played as an accompaniment to a piece or any other musical instrument, the effect is so charming as to be surprising.

Every Boy His Own Toy Maker



A great book for boys. It gives simple, practical instructions for making all manner of toys, machines and other articles, ingenious and useful. Tells how to make a Steam Engine, a Photographic Camera, a Windmill, Microscope, Electrical Machine, Galvanic Battery, Electric Telegraph, Electric Bell, Magic Lantern, Magic Mirror, Magic Lanterns, Aeolian Harp, how to make Kites, Toy Guns, Boats, Boxes, Boxes, Toys, Masks, Chief Masks, Weapons, Carts, Toy Drums, Bows and Arrows, Fog Guns, Blowguns, Tackle, Rabbit and Bird Traps, etc. 200 Illustrations. PRICE 25c Postpaid. Postage Stamps accepted.

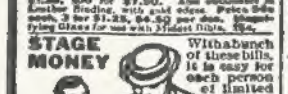
Serpent's Eggs



Box contains 12 eggs. When lit with a match, each one gradually hatches itself into a snake several feet long, which writhes and twists about in a most life-like manner. Price per box, 10c postpaid, 3 for 25c.

The "Little Giant" Typewriter

A First Class Writing Machine For $1.50



A perfect little typewriter for $1.50. There are thousands of persons who would like to use a typewriter but whose needs and business do not warrant the expensive outlay for the genuine machine. We have recently secured the Little Giant. It is strongly made, but simple, so anyone can use it. Anyone can quickly learn to operate it, and write as rapidly as they would with pen and ink. The letters of the alphabet are arranged so as to enable one to write rapidly, the numerals, 1 to 10, and the punctuation marks being included. With this machine a very good pen-man's best girl typewritten love letters, address envelopes, make out bills, and do almost any kind of work not requiring a large, expensive machine. With each typewriter we send a tube of ink and full printed instructions for using the machine. Price complete $1.50 by mail postpaid to any address in the world.

15c Card Sailer Pistol POSTPAID

It shoots small squares of cardboard, sending them spinning and sailing through the air to great distances. Length 8¼ inches. Wood barrel, metal handle, heavy rubber band. Plenty of ammunition and extra rubber with each gun in neat box. More ammunition can be made as desired. Can use without the ammunition—a lot of fun. PRICE ONLY 15c each, 3 for 40c, or $1.35 per doz. postpaid. *Stamps accepted.*

JOHNSON SMITH & CO., Dept. 980, RACINE, WIS.

A Do Less Edition of our new CATALOG mailed on receipt of 25c. Numerous bindings. Bigger and better than ever. Only book of the kind in existence. Nearly 600 pages of all the latest things in magic, the newest novelties, parlor games, sporting goods, rubber stamps, musical and instructional books, curiosities in seeds and plants, etc., unobtainable elsewhere. Remit by Stamps, Coin, Money Order, Check, etc. Honors U. S., Canadian and Foreign Stamps also accepted.

BLANK CARTRIDGE PISTOL

Protection against Burglars, Tramps, & Dogs Special Offer 1 Blank Cartridge Pistol 100 Blank Cartridges 1 Box of Blank Cartridges Catalog ONLY $1.50 The Lot

Well made and effective, modelled on latest type of Revolver; appearance alone is enough to scare a burglar. When loaded it may be as effective as a real revolver without danger to life. It takes the regular .22 Cal. Blank Cartridges—available everywhere. Sent by express only. Order at once! 1 Superior quality Blank Cartridge Pistol, 100 Blank Cartridges, (We can now ship the Lot in Catalog of latest novelties; all for ONLY $1.50. Shipped by Express only. Cannot go in parcel post. Extra Blank Cartridges 50c per 100. Special Holster (Cowboy Type) for pistol 50c. No C.O.D. shipments.

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Throw Your Voice

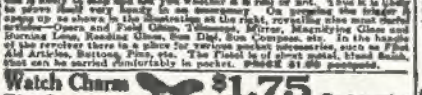
Into a trunk, under the bed or anywhere. Lots of fun fooling the teacher, policeman or friends.

The VENTRILO a little instrument, fits in the mouth out of sight, used with above for Bird Calls, etc. Anyone can use it. *Never fails.* A 16-Page Course on Ventriloquism and the Ventrilo..... ALL FOR 10 Cents

PISTOL, OPERA AND FIELD GLASS 9 In One

It is made in the shape of and looks like a regular Automatic Pistol. No one is likely to stop and see you whether it is real or not, but it is likely to prove itself very handy in an emergency. On pointing the trigger it stops up the Automatic on the right, revealing nine most useful articles—Opera and Field Glass, Telescope, Mirror, Magnifying Glass and Burning Lens, Reading Glass, Sun Dial, Sun Compass, etc. In the handle of the revolver there is a place for various pocket necessities, such as Find Aid Articles, Buttons, Pins, etc. The Pistol is of great metal, blued finish, that can be carried comfortably in pocket. PRICE $1.00 postpaid.

Watch Charm Pistol $1.75



Looks like a regular pistol. Pull the trigger and it goes off with a loud bang. Actually with powder and ball. Perfect in every detail. Made of durable metal, nickel plated, genuine barrel, handsomely engraved handle, complete in box with cleaning rod. PRICE $1.75. Also including with pistol 12 BLANK CARTRIDGES, 12 REAL CARTRIDGES and box of 25. REAL PISTOL

JOHNSON SMITH & CO., Dept. 980, RACINE, WIS.

MICROPHONE TRANSMITTER BUTTON

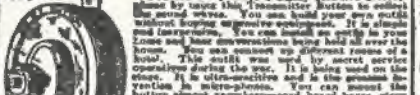
$1.00 Postpaid

You can easily make a highly sensitive dictaphone by using this Transmitter Button to collect the sound waves. You can build your own outfit without buying expensive equipment. It is simple and inexpensive. You can install an outfit in your home and have conversations being held all over the house. You can connect up different rooms of a hotel. The outfit was used by secret service operatives during the war. It is being used on the stage. It is ultra-sensitive and is the greatest invention in micro-phones. You can mount the button in any instrument, sound horn, flower pipe, stick umbrella, on the wall behind a picture frame, etc. Button is so light and small it cannot be detected. Operator can be overheard without suspecting it. You can listen in on conversations in another room. A deaf person in the audience can hear the speaker. Connected to phonograph, piano or other musical instrument, music can be heard hundreds of feet away. Used to record lectures (stenographers); often makes an old line "talk up" when nothing else will. The best microphone for radio use; carries heavy current and is extremely sensitive. Amplifies radio signals. Countless other similar uses will suggest themselves. Experimenters find the button useful for hundreds of experiments along the lines of telephones, amplifiers, loud speakers, etc. Many fascinating stunts may be devised, such as placing the button against the throat or chest to reproduce speech without sound waves. PRICE $1.00.

JOHNSON SMITH & CO., DEPT. 980, RACINE, WIS.

MAGICIAN'S BOX OF TRICKS

Apparatus and Directions for a Number of Mysterious Tricks, Enough for an Entire Evening's Entertainment . . . $1.00



Anyone Can Do Them

It is great fun mystifying your friends. Get this Conjuring Outfit and you will be the cleverest fellow in your district. It contains the apparatus for over 100 different tricks, including the MAGIC BALL AND VASE TRICK (a wooden ball placed in a hand upon replacing the lid has disappeared and is found in a separate place, complete); the HINDOO TRICK CARDS (can be made to change completely in the hand); the DISAPPEARING COIN BOX (a coin, placed in the wooden box, vanishes entirely or changes into a coin of another denomination); the GLASS GOBLET TRICK (a coin is dropped into a glass of water and the water is poured out the coin has vanished and is found somewhere else); the RIBBON FACTORY FROM THE MOUTH TRICK (a seemingly endless supply of colored paper ribbons comes out of your mouth); the DISAPPEARING HANDKERCHIEF (a handkerchief held in the hand mysteriously vanishes); the WEARING RING COIN TRICK; the ENCHANTED BOTTLE (no one but yourself is able to make it by spoon); the GREAT HAT AND DICE TRICK (a large dice is placed on top of a hat, disappears, and is found underneath, or vice versa); the GREAT PHANTOM CARD TRICK, or two from five leaves; and many others. Complete directions are sent for performing each trick. In addition to the above, a number of other tricks and illusions are fully explained for which very cheap articles may be secured and which will make or prepare the necessary apparatus. Price complete $1.00 postpaid.

DISSOLVING VIEWS 50c

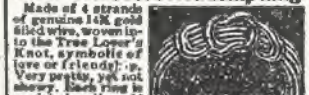
You may have a lot of fun with this little novelty show. A regular Burglar Alarm entirely of metal, having a microscopic lens in front of which is mounted a little piece of glass. This is attached to an extension of the push button in the center of the door panel, so that the unsuspecting visitor, upon pushing the button in, a spring syringe is brought into action, and the observer experiences a very great surprise. 15 cents each postpaid. JOHNSON SMITH & CO.

Lover's Knot or Friendship Ring

Made of 4 strands of genuine 14K gold filled wire, woven into the True Lover's Knot, symbolic of love or friendship. Very pretty, yet not showy. Each ring is made by hand by gold wire expert. It looks good and it is good. Price 50c Postpaid

Johnson Smith & Co.

SEX Indicator 25c



Female — Male

Hold the MAGIC INDICATOR over a man's head instantly it moves in a certain way, backward and forward. Hold it over a woman's head and it describes a complete and continuous circle. The same action can be obtained over a letter written by a man or woman, etc. It is fascinating baffling. We have never been able to learn out how it is done, but we have never seen it fail. Many novel and entertaining tests may be performed with the Sex Indicator. For example, similar results can be obtained with animals, cats, dogs, rabbits, over birds, chickens, canaries, etc. Also used to predetermine the sex of chickens and birds, etc. In fact it is sold as a polished wand and not as a toy. Price 25c, 3 for 60c, postage prepaid. Johnson Smith & Co.

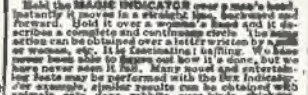
BABY TANK 25 Cents

Most remarkable toy ever invented. 2½ inches long by drawing the Tank backward, either with the hand or over the floor or table and then placing it down it will crawl along, overcoming all obstacles, in the same like manner as the larger Tanks introduced so doubtly in the great war. What makes it go is a mystery of a mystery, for there is no mechanism to wind up as is usually understood with mechanical toys, yet this tank will keep plodding along tantlmon longer than any toy of its kind. It is the greatest novelty of the most wonderful stamp. 25c postpaid.

ITCHING Powder

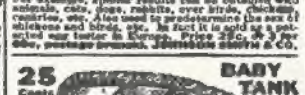
This is another good practical joke! The intense discomfort of your victims is everyone but themselves is thoroughly enjoyable. All that is necessary to do is the ball rolling is to deposit a little of the powder on a person's hand and the powder can be rolled upon to do the vicious scratch, then more more scratch, and still some more. 10c box, 3 boxes for 25c or 75c per dozen. Shipped by Express. Johnson Smith & Co., Dept. 980, Racine, Wis.

ANARCHIST BOMBS



One of these glass vials dropped in a room full of people will cause more consternation than a hurricane. The smell entirely disappears in a few minutes. 15c a box, 3 boxes for 25c or 75c per dozen. Shipped by Express. JOHNSON SMITH & COMPANY

SNEEZING POWDER



Place a very small amount of this powder on the back of your hand and blow it into the air, and everyone in the room or near will begin to sneeze without knowing the reason why. It is most amusing to hear their remarks, as they never suspect the real source, but think they have caught it one from another. Between the laughing and sneezing you will be having the time of your life. For parties, political meetings, car rides, or anywhere at all where there is a gathering of people, it is the greatest joke out. Price 10c, 3 for 25c, 75c per dozen. Shipped by Express.

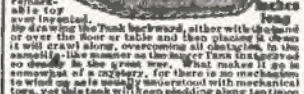
Johnson Smith & Co., Dept. 980, Racine, Wis.

COMICAL MOTTO RINGS

Lots of harmless fun and amusement wearing these Rings. Looks like a solitaire Ring (to resemble platinum), with wording on it, such as Hard Luck. Price 25c ea. Postpaid

Johnson Smith & Co., Dept. 980, Racine, Wis.

Rubber Chewing Gum



It is just like a regular package of chewing gum and looks so real that it fools everybody. And no one of course

Price 10c, 3 for 25c Postpaid

tries it twice, is not genuine until they start to chew it. There's a world of fun in this rubber chewing gum. 6 sticks to the package. Price 15c (Package); 3 for 25c; 12 for 75c, Postpaid. Stamps taken.

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JOHNSON SMITH & CO. DEPT. 980 Racine, Wis.

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

A MAGAZINE of the BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME XVIII NUMBER 2

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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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HERE is happy news for the thousands of readers who are following with bated breath the adventures of Tam in Otis Adelbert Kline's fascinating serial story of the Gods of Asia. The news is simply this: that as soon as the present serial is ended, we will print for you two marvelous serial stories, each by a superb master of the weird tale: *The Haunted Chair,* by Gaston Leroux, and *The Devil's Bride,* by Seabury Quinn. Both these authors are already favorites of the readers of this magazine, and they have outdone their previous best work in these new tales. Gaston Leroux is best known to America by his novel, *The Phantom of the Opera,* which gave the great Lon Chaney one of his most sensational parts when it was made into a motion picture. *The Haunted Chair,* which will appear in WEIRD TALES immediately after *Tam, Son of the Tiger,* is ended, is an even more thrilling masterpiece than *The Phantom of the Opera.*

Mr. Quinn's novel has everything that a weird tale should possess — horror, thrill, shudders, breath-taking interest, suspense, and vivid action. Of course, Jules de Grandin is the central figure of the story, and in it he accomplishes his most striking triumph. The writing of such a masterpiece takes careful preparation and much time, for Mr. Quinn never lets a story leave his hands until it absolutely satisfies him; and you know that he never lets you down with a dull story. The length of time required to write *The Devil's Bride* prevented Mr. Quinn from writing any short stories for you while he was at work on his novel. This explains why, with the exception of *Satan's Stepson* in this issue, you have had no stories about Jules de Grandin for several months. We feel certain that *The Devil's Bride* will amply repay you for your long wait.

"I must congratulate you upon the June-July issue of WEIRD TALES," writes J. Vernon Shea, Jr., of Pittsburgh, in a letter to the Eyrie. "It was truly one of the most superb you have yet issued. Judged from any standard, the stories were undeniably good. Of course, the story that leads them all is *The Outsider,* still to my mind the greatest weird story ever written. What a sensation, like that of greeting a long-lost brother, it was to encounter it again! The other stories, too, were very good. Perhaps the best was David H. Keller's *Seeds of Death,* with its intense final scene, so dramatic and unexpected. Then, too, *The Blood Veins of the Robot,* that grim and original tale, was well worthy of admiration. Other stories that should be mentioned were the pathetically beautiful *The Venus of Azombeii,* the

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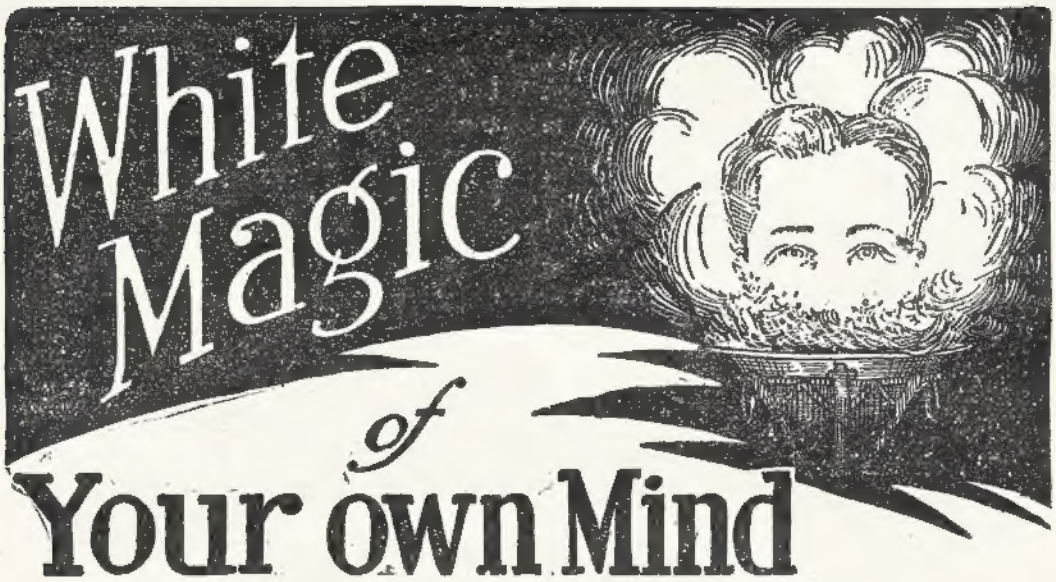

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The Footfalls Within

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

A tale of Solomon Kane, an African slave train, and the shuddery horror of dim footfalls in a long-forgotten tomb

SOLOMON KANE gazed somberly at the black woman who lay dead at his feet. Little more than a girl she was, but her wasted limbs and staring eyes showed that she had suf fered much before death brought her mer ciful relief. Kane noted the chain gall on her limbs, the deep crisscrossed scar

"Kane placed his back against a huge tree and his long rapier played a shining wheel about him."

on her back, the mark of the yoke on her neck. His cold eyes deepened strangely, showing chill glints and lights like clouds passing across depths of ice.

"Even into this lonesome land they come," he muttered. "I had not thought——"

He raised his head and gazed eastward. Black dots against the blue wheeled and circled.

"The kites mark their trail," muttered the tall Englishman. "Destruction goeth before them and death followeth after. Wo unto ye, sons of iniquity, for the wrath of God is upon ye. The cords be loosed on the iron necks of the hounds of hate and the bow of vengeance is strung. Ye are proud-stomached and strong, and the people cry out beneath your feet, but retribution cometh in the blackness of midnight and the redness of dawn."

He shifted the belt that held his heavy pistols and the keen dirk, instinctively touched the long rapier at his hip, and went stealthily but swiftly eastward. A cruel anger burned in his deep eyes like blue volcanic fires burning beneath leagues of ice, and the hand that gripped his long, cat-headed stave hardened into iron.

After some hours of steady striding, he came within hearing of the slave train that wound its laborious way

through the jungle. The piteous cries of the slaves, the shouts and curses of the drivers, and the cracking of the whips came plainly to his ears. Another hour brought him even with them, and gliding along through the jungle parallel to the trail taken by the slavers, he spied upon them safely. Kane had fought Indians in Darien and had learned much of their woodcraft.

More than a hundred blacks, young men and women, staggered along the trail, stark naked and made fast together by cruel yoke-like affairs of wood. These yokes, rough and heavy, fitted over their necks and linked them together, two by two. The yokes were in turn fettered together, making one long chain. Of the drivers there were fifteen Arabs and some seventy black warriors, whose weapons and fantastic apparel showed them to be of some eastern tribe—one of those tribes subjugated and made Moslems and allies by the conquering Arabs.

Five Arabs walked ahead of the train with some thirty of their warriors, and five brought up the rear with the rest of the black Moslems. The rest marched beside the staggering slaves, urging them along with shouts and curses and with long, cruel whips which brought spurts of blood at almost every blow. These slavers were fools as well as rogues, reflected Kane—not more than half of the slaves would survive the hardships of that trek to the coast. He wondered at the presence of these raiders, for this country lay far to the south of the districts usually frequented by the Moslems. But avarice can drive men far, as the Englishman knew. He had dealt with these gentry of old. Even as he watched, old scars burned in his back—scars made by Moslem whips in a Turkish galley. And deeper still burned Kane's unquenchable hate.

He followed, shadowing his foes like a ghost, and as he stole through the jungle, he racked his brain for a plan. How might he prevail against that horde? All the Arabs and many of the blacks were armed with guns—long, clumsy firelock affairs, it is true, but guns just the same, enough to awe any tribe of natives who might oppose them. Some carried in their wide girdles long, silver-chased pistols of more effective pattern—flintlocks of Moorish and Turkish make.

Kane followed like a brooding ghost and his rage and hatred ate into his soul like a canker. Each crack of the whips was like a blow on his own shoulders. The heat and cruelty of the tropics play queer tricks with white men. Ordinary passions become monstrous things; irritation turns to a berserker rage; anger flames into unexpected madness and men kill in a red mist of passion, and wonder, aghast, afterward.

The fury Solomon Kane felt would have been enough at any time and in any place to shake a man to his foundation; now it assumed monstrous proportions, so that Kane shivered as if with a chill, iron claws scratched at his brain and he saw the slaves and the slavers through a crimson mist. Yet he might not have put his hate-born insanity into action had it not been for a mishap.

One of the slaves, a slim young girl, suddenly faltered and slipped to the earth, dragging her yoke-mate with her. A tall, hook-nosed Arab yelled savagely and lashed her viciously. Her yoke-mate staggered partly up, but the girl remained prone, writhing weakly beneath the lash, but evidently unable to rise. She whimpered pitifully between her parched lips, and the other slavers came about, their whips descending on her quivering flesh in slashes of red agony.

A half-hour of rest and a little water would have revived her, but the Arabs had no time to spare. Solomon, biting

his arm until his teeth met in the flesh as he fought for control, thanked God that the lashing had ceased and steeled himself for the swift flash of the dagger that would put the child beyond torment. But the Arabs were in a mood for sport. Since the girl would fetch them no profit on the market block, they would utilize her for their pleasure—and the humor of their breed is such as to turn men's blood to icy water.

A shout from the first whipper brought the rest crowding around, their bearded faces split in grins of delighted anticipation, while the black warriors edged nearer, their brutish eyes gleaming. The wretched slaves realized their masters' intentions and a chorus of pitiful cries rose from them.

Kane, sick with horror, realized, too, that the girl's was to be no easy death. He knew what the tall Moslem intended to do, as he stooped over her with a keen dagger such as the Arabs used for skinning game. Madness overcame the Englishman. He valued his own life little; he had risked it without thought for the sake of a negro baby or a small animal. Yet he would not have premeditatedly thrown away his one hope of succoring the wretches in the train. But he acted without conscious thought. A pistol was smoking in his hand and the tall butcher was down in the dust of the trail with his brains oozing out, before Kane realized what he had done.

He was almost as astonished as the Arabs, who stood frozen for a moment and then burst into a medley of yells. Several threw up their clumsy firelocks and sent their heavy balls crashing through the trees, and the rest, thinking no doubt that they were ambushed, led a reckless charge into the jungle. The bold suddenness of that move was Kane's undoing. Had they hesitated a moment longer he might have faded away unobserved, but as it was he saw no choice but to meet them openly and sell his life as highly as he could.

And indeed it was with a certain ferocious satisfaction that he faced his howling attackers. They halted in sudden amazement as the tall, grim Englishman stepped from behind his tree, and in that instant one of them died with a bullet from Kane's remaining pistol in his heart. Then with yells of savage rage they flung themselves on their lone defier. Kane placed his back against a huge tree and his long rapier played a shining wheel about him. Three blacks and an Arab were hacking at him with their heavy curved blades while the rest milled about, snarling like wolves, as they sought to drive in blade or ball without maiming one of their own number.

The flickering rapier parried the whistling simitars and the Arab died on its point, which seemed to hesitate in his heart only an instant before it pierced the brain of a black swordsman. Another ebon warrior, dropping his sword and leaping in to grapple at close quarters, was disemboweled by the dirk in Kane's left hand, and the others gave back in sudden fear. A heavy ball smashed against the tree close to Kane's head and he tensed himself to spring and die in the thick of them. Then their sheikh lashed them on with his long whip and Kane heard him shouting fiercely for his warriors to take the infidel alive. Kane answered the command with a sudden cast of his dirk, which hummed so close to the sheikh's head that it slit his turban and sank deep in the shoulder of one behind him.

The sheikh drew his silver-chased pistols, threatening his own men with death if they did not take the white man, and they charged in again desperately. One of the black men ran full upon Kane's

sword and an Arab behind the fellow, with the craft of his race, thrust the screaming wretch suddenly forward on the weapon, driving it hilt-deep in his writhing body, fouling the blade. Before Kane could wrench it clear, with a yell of triumph the pack rushed in on him and bore him down by sheer weight of numbers. As they grappled him from all sides, the Puritan wished in vain for the dirk he had thrown away. But even so, his taking was none too easy.

Blood spattered and faces caved in beneath his iron-hard fists that splintered teeth and shattered bone. A black warrior reeled away disabled from a vicious drive of knee to groin. Even when they had him stretched out and piled manweight on him until he could no longer strike with fists or foot, his long lean fingers sank fiercely through a black beard to lock about a corded throat in a grip that took the power of three strong men to break and left the victim gasping and green-faced.

At last, panting from the terrific struggle, they had him bound hand and foot and the sheikh, thrusting his pistols back into his silken sash, came striding to stand and look down at his captive. Kane glared up at the tall, lean frame, at the hawk-like face with its black curled beard and arrogant brown eyes.

"I am the sheikh Hassim ben Said," said the Arab. "Who are you?"

"My name is Solomon Kane," growled the Puritan in the sheikh's own language. "I am an Englishman, you heathen jackal."

The dark eyes of the Arab flickered with interest.

"Sulieman Kahani," said he, giving the Arabesque equivalent of the English name, "I have heard of you—you have fought the Turks betimes and the Barbary corsairs have licked their wounds because of you."

Kane deigned no reply. Hassim shrugged his shoulders.

"You will bring a fine price," said he, "Mayhap I will take you to Stamboul, where there are shas who would desire such a man among their slaves. And I mind me now of one Kemal Bey, a man of ships, who wears a deep scar across his face of your making and who curses the name of Englishman. He will pay me a high price for you. And behold, oh Frank, I do you the honor of appointing you a separate guard. You shall not walk in the yoke-chain but free save for your hands."

Kane made no answer, and at a sign from the sheikh, he was hauled to his feet and his bonds loosened except for his hands, which they left bound firmly behind him. A stout cord was looped about his neck and the other end of this was given into the hand of a huge black warrior who bore in his free hand a great curved simitar.

"And now what think ye of my favor to you, Frank?" queried the sheikh.

"I am thinking," answered Kane in a slow, deep voice of menace, "that I would trade my soul's salvation to face you and your sword, alone and unarmed, and to tear the heart from your breast with my naked fingers."

Such was the concentrated hate in his deep resounding voice, and such primal, unconquerable fury blazed from his terrible eyes, that the hardened and fearless chieftain blanched and involuntarily recoiled as if from a maddened beast.

Then Hassim recovered his poise and with a short word to his followers, strode to the head of the cavalcade. Kane noted, with thankfulness, that the respite occasioned by his capture had given the girl who had fallen a chance to rest and revive. The skinning knife had not had time to more than touch her; she was able to reel along. Night was not far away.

Soon the slavers would be forced to halt and camp.

The Englishman perforce took up the trek, his black guard remaining a few paces behind with his huge blade ever ready. Kane also noted with a touch of grim vanity, that three more blacks marched close behind, muskets ready and matches burning. They had tasted his prowess and they were taking no chances. His weapons had been recovered and Hassim had promptly appropriated all except the cat-headed ju-ju staff. This had been contemptuously cast aside by him and taken up by one of the blacks.

THE Englishman was presently aware that a lean, gray-bearded Arab was walking along at his side. This Arab seemed desirous of speaking but strangely timid, and the source of his timidity seemed, curiously enough, the ju-ju stave which he had taken from the black man who had picked it up, and which he now turned uncertainly in his hands.

"I am Yussef the Hadji," said this Arab suddenly. "I have naught against you. I had no hand in attacking you and would be your friend if you would let me. Tell me, Frank, whence comes this staff and how comes it into your hands?"

Kane's first inclination was to consign his questioner to the infernal regions, but a certain sincerity of manner in the old man made him change his mind and he answered: "It was given me by my blood-brother—a black magician of the Slave Coast, named N'Longa."

The old Arab nodded and muttered in his beard and presently sent a black running forward to bid Hassim return. The tall sheikh presently came striding back along the slow-moving column, with a clank and jingle of daggers and sabers, with Kane's dirk and pistols thrust into his wide sash.

"Look, Hassim," the old Arab thrust forward the stave, "you cast it away without knowing what you did!"

"And what of it?" growled the sheikh. "I see naught but a staff—sharp-pointed and with the head of a cat on the other end—a staff with strange infidel carvings upon it."

The older man shook it at him in excitement: "This staff is older than the world! It holds mighty magic! I have read of it in the old iron-bound books and Mohammed—on whom peace!—himself hath spoken of it by allegory and parable! See the cat-head upon it? It is the head of a goddess of ancient Egypt! Ages ago, before Mohammed taught, before Jerusalem was, the priests of Bast bore this rod before the bowing, chanting worshippers! With it Musa did wonders before Pharaoh and when the Yahudi fled from Egypt they bore it with them. And for centuries it was the scepter of Israel and Judah and with it Sulieman ben Daoud drove forth the conjurers and magicians and prisoned the efreets and the evil genii! Look! Again in the hands of a Sulieman we find the ancient rod!"

Old Yussef had worked himself into a pitch of almost fanatic fervor but Hassim merely shrugged his shoulders.

"It did not save the Jews from bondage nor this Sulieman from our captivity," said he; "so I value it not as much as I esteem the long thin blade with which he loosed the souls of three of my best swordsmen."

Yussef shook his head. "Your mockery will bring you to no good end, Hassim. Some day you will meet a power that will not divide before your sword or fall to your bullets. I will keep the staff, and I warn you—abuse not the Frank. He has borne the holy and terrible staff of Sulieman and Musa and the Pharaohs, and who knows what magic he has drawn

therefrom? For it is older than the world and has known the terrible hands of strange, dark pre-Adamite priests in the silent cities beneath the seas, and has drawn from an Elder World mystery and magic unguessed by humankind. There were strange kings and stranger priests when the dawns were young, and evil was, even in their day. And with this staff they fought the evil which was ancient when their strange world was young, so many millions of years ago that a man would shudder to count them."

Hassim answered impatiently and strode away with old Yussef following him persistently and chattering away in a querulous tone. Kane shrugged his mighty shoulders. With what he knew of the strange powers of that strange staff, he was not one to question the old man's assertions, fantastic as they seemed. This much he knew—that it was made of a wood that existed nowhere on earth today. It needed but the proof of sight and touch to realize that its material had grown in some world apart. The exquisite workmanship of the head, of a pre-pyramidal age, and the hieroglyphics, symbols of a language that was forgotten when Rome was young—these, Kane sensed, were additions as modern to the antiquity of the staff itself, as would be English words carved on the stone monoliths of Stonehenge.

As for the cat-head—looking at it sometimes Kane had a peculiar feeling of alteration; a faint sensing that once the pommel of the staff was carved with a different design. The dust-ancient Egyptian who had carved the head of Bast had merely altered the original figure, and what that figure had been, Kane had never tried to guess. A close scrutiny of the staff always aroused a disquieting and almost dizzy suggestion of abysses of eons, unprovocative to further speculation.

The day wore on. The sun beat down mercilessly, then screened itself in the great trees as it slanted toward the horizon. The slaves suffered fiercely for water and a continual whimpering rose from their ranks as they staggered blindly on. Some fell and half crawled, and were half dragged by their reeling yokemates. When all were buckling from exhaustion, the sun dipped, night rushed on, and a halt was called. Camp was pitched, guards thrown out, and the slaves were fed scantily and given enough water to keep life in them—but only just enough. Their fetters were not loosened but they were allowed to sprawl about as they might. Their fearful thirst and hunger having been somewhat eased, they bore the discomforts of their shackles with characteristic stoicism.

Kane was fed without his hands being untied and he was given all the water he wished. The patient eyes of the slaves watched him drink, silently, and he was sorely ashamed to guzzle what others suffered for; he ceased before his thirst was fully quenched. A wide clearing had been selected, on all sides of which rose gigantic trees. After the Arabs had eaten and while the black Moslems were still cooking their food, old Yussef came to Kane and began to talk about the staff again. Kane answered his questions with admirable patience, considering the hatred he bore the whole race to which the Hadji belonged, and during their conversation, Hassim came striding up and looked down in contempt. Hassim, Kane ruminated, was the very symbol of militant Islam—bold, reckless, materialistic, sparing nothing, fearing nothing, as sure of his own destiny and as contemptuous of the rights of others as the most powerful Western king.

"Are you maundering about that stick again?" he gibed. "Hadji, you grow childish in your old age."

Yussef's beard quivered in anger. He shook the staff at his sheikh like a threat of evil.

"Your mockery little befits your rank, Hassim," he snapped. "We are in the heart of a dark and demon-haunted land, to which long ago were banished the devils from Arabia. If this staff, which any but a fool can tell is no rod of any world we know, has existed down to our day, who knows what other things, tangible or intangible, may have existed through the ages? This very trail we follow—know you how old it is? Men followed it before the Seljuk came out of the East or the Roman came out of the West. Over this very trail, legends say, the great Sulieman came when he drove the demons westward out of Asia and prisoned them in strange prisons. And will you say——"

A wild shout interrupted him. Out of the shadows of the jungle a black came flying as if from the hounds of Doom. With arms flinging wildly, eyes rolling to display the whites and mouth wide open so that all his gleaming teeth were visible, he made an image of stark terror not soon forgotten. The Moslem horde leaped up, snatching their weapons, and Hassim swore: "That's Ali, whom I sent to scout for meat—perchance a lion——"

But no lion followed the black man who fell at Hassim's feet, mouthing gibberish, and pointing wildly back at the black jungle whence the nerve-strung watchers expected some brain-shattering horror to burst.

"He says he found a strange mausoleum back in the jungle," said Hassim with a scowl, "but he cannot tell what frightened him. He only knows a great horror overwhelmed him and sent him flying. Ali, you are a fool and a rogue."

He kicked the groveling black viciously, but the other Arabs drew about him in some uncertainty. The panic was spreading among the black warriors.

"They will bolt in spite of us," muttered a bearded Arab, uneasily watching the blacks who milled together, jabbered excitedly and flung fearsome glances over the shoulders. "Hassim, 'twere better to march on a few miles. This is an evil place after all, and though 'tis likely the fool Ali was frighted by his own shadow —still——"

"Still," jeered the sheikh, "you will all feel better when we have left it behind. Good enough; to still your fears I will move camp—but first I will have a look at this thing. Lash up the slaves; we'll swing into the jungle and pass by this mausoleum; perhaps some great king lies there. The blacks will not be afraid if we all go in a body with guns."

So the weary slaves were whipped into wakefulness and stumbled along beneath the whips again. The black warriors went silently and nervously, reluctantly obeying Hassim's implacable will but huddling close to their white masters. The moon had risen, huge, red and sullen, and the jungle was bathed in a sinister silver glow that etched the brooding trees in black shadow. The trembling Ali pointed out the way, somewhat reassured by his savage master's presence.

And so they passed through the jungle until they came to a strange clearing among the giant trees—strange because nothing grew there. The trees ringed it in a disquieting symmetrical manner and no lichen or moss grew on the earth, which seemed to have been blasted and blighted in a strange fashion. And in the midst of the glade stood the mausoleum. A great brooding mass of stone it was, pregnant with ancient evil. Dead with the death of a hundred centuries it seemed, yet Kane was aware that the air *pulsed* about it, as with the slow, un-

human breathing of some gigantic, invisible monster.

The black Moslems drew back, muttering, assailed by the evil atmosphere of the place. The slaves stood in a patient, silent group beneath the trees. The Arabs went forward to the frowning black mass, and Yussef, taking Kane's cord from his ebon guard, led the Englishman with him like a surly mastiff, as if for protection against the unknown.

"Some mighty sultan doubtless lies here," said Hassim, tapping the stone with his scabbard-end.

"Whence come these stones?" muttered Yussef uneasily. "They are of dark and forbidding aspect. Why should a great sultan lie in state so far from any habitation of man? If there were ruins of an old city hereabouts it would be different——"

He bent to examine the heavy metal door with its huge lock, curiously sealed and fused. He shook his head forebodingly as he made out the ancient Hebraic characters carved on the door.

"I can not read them," he quavered, "and belike it is well for me I can not. What ancient kings sealed up, is not good for men to disturb. Hassim, let us hence. This place is pregnant with evil for the sons of men."

But Hassim gave him no heed. "He who lies within is no son of Islam," said he, "and why should we not despoil him of the gems and riches that undoubtedly were laid to rest with him? Let us break open this door."

Some of the Arabs shook their heads doubtfully but Hassim's word was law. Calling to him a huge black who bore a heavy hammer, he ordered him to break open the door.

As the black swung up his sledge, Kane gave a sharp exclamation. Was he mad? The apparent antiquity of this brooding mass of stone was proof that it had stood undisturbed for thousands of years. *Yet he could have sworn that he heard the sound of footfalls within.* Back and forth they padded, as if something paced the narrow confines of that grisly prison in a never-ending monotony of movement. A cold hand touched the spine of Solomon Kane. Whether the sounds registered on his conscious ear or on some unsounded deep of soul or subfeeling, he could not tell, but he *knew* that somewhere within his consciousness there re-echoed the tramp of monstrous feet from within that ghastly mausoleum.

"Stop!" he exclaimed. "Hassim, I may be mad, but I hear the tread of some fiend within that pile of stone."

Hassim raised his hand and checked the hovering hammer. He listened intently, and the others strained their ears in a silence that had suddenly become tense.

"I hear nothing," grunted a bearded giant.

"Nor I," came a quick chorus. "The Frank is mad!"

"Hear ye anything, Yussef?" asked Hassim sardonically.

The old Hadji shifted nervously. His face was uneasy.

"No, Hassim, no, yet——"

Kane decided he must be mad. Yet in his heart he knew he was never saner, and he knew somehow that this occult keenness of the deeper senses that set him apart from the Arabs came from long association with the ju-ju staff that old Yussef now held in his shaking hands.

Hassim laughed harshly and made a gesture to the black. The hammer fell with a crash that re-echoed deafeningly and shivered off through the black jungle in a strangely altered cachinnation. Again —again—and again the hammer fell, driven with all the power of the rippling

black muscles and the mighty ebon body. And between the blows Kane still heard that lumbering tread, and he who had never known fear as men know it, felt the cold hand of terror clutching at his heart.

This fear was apart from earthly or mortal fear, as the sound of the footfalls was apart from mortal tread. Kane's fright was like a cold wind blowing on him from outer realms of unguessed Darkness, bearing him the evil and decay of an outlived epoch and an unutterably ancient period. Kane was not sure whether he heard those footfalls or by some dim instinct sensed them. But he was sure of their reality. They were not the tramp of man or beast; but inside that black, hideously ancient mausoleum some nameless *thing* moved with soul-shaking and elephantine tread.

The great black sweated and panted with the difficulty of his task. But at last, beneath the heavy blows the ancient lock shattered; the hinges snapped; the door burst inward. And Yussef screamed. From that black gaping entrance no tiger-fanged beast or demon of solid flesh and blood leaped forth. But a fearful stench flowed out in billowing, almost tangible waves and in one brain-shattering, ravening rush, whereby the gaping door seemed to gush *blood*, the Horror was upon them. It enveloped Hassim, and the fearless chieftain, hewing vainly at the almost intangible terror, screamed with sudden, unaccustomed fright as his lashing simitar whistled only through stuff as yielding and unharmable as air, and he felt himself lapped by coils of death and destruction.

Yussef shrieked like a lost soul, dropped the ju-ju stave and joined his fellows who streamed out into the jungle in mad flight, preceded by the howling black warriors. Only the black slaves fled not, but stood shackled to their doom, wailing their terror. As in a nightmare of delirium Kane saw Hassim swayed like a reed in the wind, lapped about by a gigantic pulsing red Thing that had neither shape nor earthly substance. Then as the crack of splintering bones came to him, and the sheikh's body buckled like a straw beneath a stamping hoof, the Englishman burst his bonds with one volcanic effort and caught up the ju-ju stave.

Hassim was down, crushed and dead, sprawled like a broken toy with shattered limbs awry, and the red pulsing Thing was lurching toward Kane like a thick cloud of blood in the air, that continually changed its shape and form, and yet somehow *trod* lumberingly as if on monstrous legs!

KANE felt the cold fingers of fear claw at his brain but he braced himself, and lifting the ancient staff, struck with all his power into the center of the Horror. And he felt an unnamable, immaterial substance meet and give way before the falling staff. Then he was almost strangled by the nauseous burst of unholy stench that flooded the air, and somewhere down the dim vistas of his soul's consciousness re-echoed unbearably a hideous formless cataclysm that he knew was the death-screaming of the monster. For it was down and dying at his feet, its crimson paling in slow surges like the rise and receding of red waves on some foul coast. And as it paled, the soundless screaming dwindled away into cosmic distances as though it faded into some sphere apart and aloof beyond human ken.

Kane, dazed and incredulous, looked down on a shapeless, colorless, all but invisible mass at his feet which he knew was the corpse of the Horror, dashed back into the black realms from whence

(Please turn to page 285)

The Golden Elixir

By PAUL ERNST

A whimsical, eery story of a man whose personality was divided into two parts, and the awkward situations into which he blundered in consequence

I WAS sitting at my work bench late one afternoon when my door catch—which I always leave hospitably unlatched—clicked softly to announce a visitor. A tall thin young man, John Lancellar, an acquaintance who lived in the apartment above mine, drifted into the room.

The word "drifted" has been used so often to describe a character's entry that I hesitate to apply it here. But it is the most appropriate word I can think of. Literally, John drifted. I have never seen anyone else, man or woman, capable of moving so softly. He walked over the carpet without noise, as though his feet did not actually touch the floor but stopped soundlessly in air a sixteenth of an inch above it.

He chose his favorite chair, in the far corner opposite the window, and sat down.

"Hello," he said after a while, speaking without moving his lips, like a ventriloquist practising his act.

He lit a cigarette with almost no movement at all, allowing the burnt match to drop of itself into the ash receiver set into the arm of the chair. I think he always chose that chair because of its easy smoking comfort. Either he was the laziest of men, or he was a great natural efficiency expert.

"Isn't it a shame," he murmured, his lips still immobile as though he were speaking through a dummy on his knee, "how many useless things we are called on to do in this life,"

I use a comma at the end of his speech because John himself seldom troubled to conclude his conversations with a tonal period.

"We have to go through so much senseless routine," he complained. "We have to spend so much time in mingling with people we would rather avoid, and in performing tasks we don't like. Two-thirds of our days are wasted,"

He moved his hand a quarter of an inch so that his cigarette ash might clear his immaculate sleeve on its way into the ash receiver.

"But John," I could not help saying, "surely you have little cause for complaint. You have plenty of time to yourself."

For John is an heir, and he makes that his business. Some day a wealthy stepfather is going to die and leave him a lot of money. In the meanwhile he lives on a modest income from his mother's inheritance, and indulges himself in his two hobbies: chemistry and clothes. In his laboratory, as he calls his transformed kitchenette, he concocts weird liquids that smell; and in his dressing-room he selects with great care the exact blends of handkerchiefs, socks and neckties that make him the best-dressed man I have ever met.

"I haven't as much leisure time as I would like," he replied. "I seem to have so many silly social functions to attend. Tonight, for instance, I have to go to a dinner at Mrs. Strath-Wheeting's. Can you imagine a more absurd way of wasting an evening?"

I stared resentfully at him. I had often wished to be included in an affair

"The first I knew of his presence was a sudden feeling that I was not alone in the room."

of Mrs. Strath-Wheeting's. Gatherings at her house were glittering. Then, there was her daughter, May. I had met May several times at less awesome affairs, and liked her. I think she liked me, too. At any rate she had once asked me to a Strath-Wheeting reception—but I had not gone because her invitation had not been backed by a card from her mother. Evidently I was not enough of a celebrity for the mother. . . .

"A whole evening wasted," John's voice recalled me from my slightly envious revery. "An entire evening that might profitably be spent in a good book or an experiment to separate chemically the dual personality of man,"

He sighed profoundly.

"And this is only one of many. Tomorrow afternoon I must have tea with the Jarnslakes who have just returned from the Dalmatian coast. Tomorrow night there is an aviation dance at the Sky Club. The night after that there is an affair at the Venetian Gardens I have to attend. And the night after that there is something else, I can't think what. Well, you know, really," And he moved a finger to express that the limit had nearly been reached.

"Why do you go out this way if you don't enjoy it?" I asked.

"I have to," he said with an infinitesimal shrug. "These people are old friends. If I didn't go I would offend them, and that would be terrible. There is such labor connected with offense. I would have to run around corners to avoid insulted people. I don't like to run,"

He sighed again.

"No, one must go to these affairs if one is unlucky enough to be invited.

And one must turn on and off the streams of conversation that ensue. Why, a child of ten could learn the patter,"

I thought I saw a curious light come into his eyes then, as if he had said some profound and immensely interesting thing. Once when I had called on him in the midst of a chemical experiment I had surprized the same light in his eyes. An enthralled, absorbed gleam. The glow of unexpected, important achievement. It seemed out of place on the heels of so trivial a complaint.

"Something ought to be done about the problem of our routine-wasted time. I mean, generally speaking. Personally I think I have solved that problem." The glow deepened in his eyes. "I think that tonight, if I have done my work as well as it appears to have been done, will be the last evening I need ever be bored by doing things I don't want to do,"

He rose to go, his trousers falling into impeccable creases down the front of his long legs.

"Tomorrow," he concluded enigmatically, "I will put it to the test. . . ."

He glided to the door and opened it noiselessly.

"Wait a minute," I called, annoyed at being left hanging on an unfinished thought. "What do you mean, put it to the test? What is 'it'? And what is 'the test'?"

"I'll tell you more about it tomorrow," he said vaguely. The next moment, wraith-like, he was gone, and the catch clicked almost inaudibly behind him.

NEXT evening he came again. This time I was so absorbed that I did not hear him enter at all. The first I knew of his presence was when, feeling suddenly that I was not alone in the room, I glanced at the chair opposite the window. There, looking as though he had been idly observing me for an hour or so, was John.

His figure blended uncannily with the dusk—in my abstraction I had worked along past the time when the lights should have been turned on, and the room was dim in the failing daylight.

Evidently, for the first time in weeks, he was not dining out: he had on a dark purple silk robe, lounge trousers, and purple clocked socks disappearing into suave Moroccan slippers.

"How long have you been here?" I asked, amazedly.

"About fifteen minutes," he said. I noticed that his voice seemed more muffled and indistinct than ever.

"I didn't hear you come in."

"That," he said, "is quite natural,"

I couldn't understand why he should define my momentary deafness as natural, but I let it pass.

He gazed at me with an expression of excitement and content.

"I've got it!" he exclaimed. "I've got it at last!"

"Got what?" I inquired uncertainly. Then, "Oh yes, the mysterious 'it' you referred to yesterday."

He nodded. "The thing that shall make me free." He exulted. "From now on all my life's routine can be performed mechanically, apart from me. All my waking hours will be unoccupied, waiting for me to fill them as I like. I am delivered from bondage—into a land where possibly no human has ever gone before. It is stupendous! And no one will ever know about it but myself—and you. You won't count," he said, "because, even if you did betray my secret, nobody would believe you,"

I thanked him ironically in behalf of my profession of secrets-betrayer, and asked how he had attained his enviable freedom.

"By chemistry," he informed me, and he proceeded to explain.

"Ever since I've been old enough to

comprehend the subject," he began, "I have been fascinated by the double structure of man. Dual personality. Here we are, two separate and flimsily connected parts: a flesh and blood mechanism largely ruled by instinct and habit; and a delicate, substanceless thought mechanism that makes the real individual, Intelligence.

"It has been my dream to disconnect these two parts—to free mind from matter. You see what that would mean:

"The intelligence would be at liberty to travel anywhere in time and space; and the body could be left to its own devices. It could be let alone in perfect safety. Practically all our activities are performed by habit. If a separation could be achieved we could set our physical selves to the senseless tasks that form our routine, and our intellects—the real We—could wander off to wherever fancy dictated."

He crossed his legs with amazing expenditure of energy.

"Well," he said gravely, "I've learned a way to split man's dual personality—at least I can do it in my own case. I can make twins of myself—my body standing independently beside the shadowy outline that is my mental conception of myself. And I can send my body on about its business, guided only now and then by a thread of thought, while my intelligence busies itself as it pleases,"

I stared at him with speechless astonishment. Never before had I known him to take the trouble to concoct a joke. And here was a jest so ponderous and intricate that it might have been the masterpiece of a humorous Gargantua! I studied his face, there in the growing dusk, to see if I could surprize a smile. He was entirely serious, as far as his expression would indicate.

"How have you managed this psychic divorce?" I asked, preserving a solemnity as great as his own. If he thought I was to be taken in so easily he should find he was mistaken!

"By chemistry, as I have said," he replied. "I have invented a potion that halves my personality—that splits apart my conscious and subconscious selves,"

"Indeed. How interesting! What are the ingredients?"

"You wouldn't know if I told you," he said with a shrug.

If there is anything I dislike it is the maddening sentence, "You wouldn't understand."

"Probably," I suggested impatiently, "you have been experimenting with a bottle of Bourbon. I've heard that splits a man's personality."

He smiled placidly. "There's a trace of alcohol in my new drug," he murmured. "More than that I refuse to disclose."

"What does the stuff look like? At least you can describe it."

"It's clear yellow," he answered, "with a glitter to it as if it were transparent gold. But in spite of its clarity it has an oily sheen. There's some upstairs in my laboratory. A few drops in the bottom of a measuring-beaker. Come up and see it, if you like,"

I thought I began to catch the drift of his joke: I was to trudge up to his smelly kitchenette, see nothing at all, and bring hoots of laughter down on my gullible head.

"No, thanks," I said promptly. "I'll take your word for it. There's one thing I would like to see, however—I'd like to see you in the throes of your experiment some time when you're testing this drug on yourself."

"You're seeing me now," John said.

"What? Oh, yes, of course I'm seeing you. What of it?"

"I mean," he explained soberly, "you're now seeing me in the throes of an experi-

ment. I took some of my new drug an hour ago. Shortly afterward I sent my body out to take May Strath-Wheeting to dinner at the Venetian Gardens. I myself—my intelligence, rather—stayed behind to read a book. I found that impossible because of something I hadn't foreseen: I have no physical hands with which to open a book or turn its leaves. So I came down here,"

"Then," I said, keeping my gravity with difficulty, "I am now gazing at, and talking to——"

"——my disembodied intelligence," finished John Lancellar.

"Pleased to meet you," I acknowledged the introduction. "For a disembodied intelligence you look very well—and extremely substantial!"

He frowned with annoyance.

"Don't be a fool," he said. "I tell you in all seriousness that you are now conversing, not with the John Lancellar that the world can see and touch and hear, but with John Lancellar's conception of himself."

"But how is it that I can see and hear and touch John Lancellar's conception of himself?" I asked, genuinely curious to hear what imaginative ingenuity he could apply to the question.

"You can't," he replied. "It is impossible for you really to see me—you perceive only the idea of me; although, for that matter, everything on earth you think you see, is, actually, but an opinion. Schopenhauer has said that the world is only the perception of the perceiver; in other words, it is all idea——"

"Leave out the metaphysics," I pleaded.

"You aren't really hearing me, either," he resumed. "You are receiving my thought messages by mental telepathy. It is a process having nothing to do with physical hearing. As for being able to touch me—come over here and try it. You'll find your hand passes right through me,"

"I'll take your word for that, too," I said bruskly, scenting another attempt on his part to bring his joke to a side-splitting point against me.

"But surely it is apparent that I'm telling you the truth," he persisted. "For one thing, you can see that my lips do not move as I speak to you, which proves the telepathy claim——"

"Your lips never do move," I interrupted. "You always talk as though you were afraid they'd split if you rounded your p's and b's and m's with them. Come again."

"Well, you can observe, if you look closely, that there is no real substance to me——"

"I can see that you have on a very handsome silk robe," I said. "Your Royal Disembodiedness is to be congratulated for its taste in raiment."

He caught me up at once.

"There," he said. "That proves it. I don't own any such robe as this at all. There is nothing like it in my wardrobe. I merely saw it in a shop window the other day, liked it—and am now imagining it on myself. All mental conception. See?"

"Wonderful!" I applauded. "There's one thing, however, that disappoints me in you."

He looked an interrogation.

"Your use of this marvelous discovery," I explained. "Here you have freed your intellect entirely. You have all of time to play about in, and all of space. . . . I presume you can pass through doors and walls, all that sort of thing?"

He nodded.

"Exactly. Well, able to journey into past or future and read their great riddles like Mr. Wells' fourth dimensional traveler, and capable of penetrating into the most hidden dens of mankind and

listening in on the secrets whispered there—you choose to send your body to take May Strath-Wheeting out to dinner, and trot your massive intelligence in here to play with the not so massive intelligence of a commonplace writer! It's depressing, John. You have invented a cannon-ball with which to annihilate a flea. You utilize your great formula only to relieve yourself of social boredom. I'm surprized at your petty mindedness!"

Actually the man looked as downcast as though this were a serious reprimand about a serious fault!

"All in good time," he murmured defensively. "Just now I am still unsure of the effects of my drug. I would hate to find myself stranded in the Twenty-fifth Century, or penetrate to some secret cavern at the earth's center and find myself trapped there. I have much more experimental work to do before I care to trust myself to such extreme enterprises. And meanwhile, why shouldn't I take advantage of the fact that my body can painlessly perform my work for me?"

"Aren't you afraid your body, deprived of your intelligence, will be carried home on a stretcher from a street accident?" I suggested. "Or that it will come moaning in from the Venetian Gardens with a stomach-ache derived from ordering pickles and milk, or deviled crabs and ice cream?"

"Not at all," he said. "I never order those things myself—why should my body, ruled by blind habit, order them on its own? And no genius is needed to avoid a street accident: the eye warns the involuntary nervous system of the approach of danger, and the body automatically moves for safety. All mechanical. All automatic."

"And dinner table conversation?"

"The same," he said with a shrug. "However, now and then I expect I'll have to get in touch with that distant body of mine and give it an intelligent lift up,"

"Oh, you can do that, can you?"

"Certainly." His eyes took on a far-away look. "At this moment, to give an illustration, I see that May and I have concluded our meal and are starting to leave the Gardens. We are waiting while I get my hat from the hat-check girl. . . ."

He frowned suddenly as though he did not like what his mind's eye pictured to him.

"I say," he muttered, "pardon me a minute. Little mix-up here. . . ."

At the moment I was lighting a cigarette. I dimly heard him say, "Some trouble about my hat. They seem to have lost track of it. This needs all of me. . . . If you'll excuse me I'll go now. . . ."

I looked up from my cigarette, after tossing the match into a tray beside me. I started to say something, I forget now what. And then the cigarette dropped from my lips and burned a hole in my coat before I could gather my scattered wits.

John was gone. The chair in the dark corner was empty. I was alone in the room.

The chair was a good ten feet from the doorway. I probably had not taken three full seconds to light my cigarette. Yet during that interval when my face was averted he had bounded noiselessly from the chair and out the door. Yes, and he had taken time to close the catch with uncanny quietness, too. I'll swear I never heard it click after him.

Had he been nothing but the tenuous idea he pretended to be, he could have faded no more suddenly and completely. Reluctantly admiring his agility, I switched on the lights and began to cook my dinner.

I RATHER expected John would visit me next evening and continue his intricate humor, but he didn't. Nor did

he appear the second or third evening. It was a week before I saw him again. Then, as before, he drifted in so noiselessly that I didn't hear him enter. Again my first realization that I was not alone in the room was when I glanced up from my work to see him regarding me from the chair opposite the window, his figure blending hazily with the dusk.

"How's the disembodied intelligence?" I greeted him, trying to appear as though I had known he was there right along. "Did you retrieve your hat?"

"Oh yes," he nodded, "I got it all right,"

"Then why didn't you come back and tell me about it sooner?" I demanded. "You say, 'Excuse me a minute,' and dissolve through the door—I suppose you dissolved through the door?" I interrupted myself.

"Of course," he murmured.

"You dissolve through the door, and don't come near me again for a week. Do you call that good manners?"

"I couldn't get back." he replied. "You see, once I have rejoined myself, reoccupied my body, I am caught there till I take another draft of the drug. I can't just go in and out at will,"

"Then you had to stay put for the rest of that evening?"

"Yes. And a dull enough evening it was," he answered, "though May did her best to enliven it,"

"Are you going to repeat the separation stunt tonight?" I inquired.

"I already have done so," he replied. "At this moment," he said, pensively gazing at the ceiling, "my body is feeding itself at the Moresby home. May Strath-Wheeting is sitting next to me. It is amazing," he mused irritably, "how often that girl is seated next to me!

"When a common variety of dinner table remark is passed my way I answer it with the automatic response expected. If somebody propounds a statement needing more than mechanical attention, my body sits mute as if pondering the matter with profound wisdom. You know, I find I have got quite a reputation for profound wisdom in the last ten days, simply by this practise of keeping silent. I suppose it is a simple variation of Wise Old Owl. What do you think?"

I told him I thought that, in the interests of patriotism, he should never move his place of residence away from this country. The rugged grandeur of his imagination should be saved for America like the Grand Canyon and the redwood trees.

He shook his head exasperatedly. "There's no convincing some people," he said. And he repeated the invitation to try to touch him, assuring me my hand would pass right through him. I declined to make an ass of myself.

"Then I'll come over to you, if you're so afraid I'm gulling you,"

"Don't bother," I told him.

"Or you can call up the Moresbys," he persisted. "They'll tell you I'm there right now,"

"Have it your own way," I said with a snort.

"Then you believe me?"

"Oh, certainly," I replied. "Certainly. Certainly. By the way, I see you still have on the imagined silk lounging-robe. Don't you think the shopkeeper has a protest coming—the way you are wearing his things without paying for them?"

"It isn't harming his show-piece any if I wear just a conception of it," argued John, affecting to take me seriously.

"No, I suppose not," I murmured.

There was a little silence then, while I meditated on the persuasive power of earnestness. Told almost anything with sufficient fervor, a man will believe a bit of it in spite of himself. He may know certainly a thing is impossible, and yet

find himself investigating it with furtive curiosity if it has been touted enough. In this instance I caught myself peering intently at John Lancellar in an absurd effort to see if he really *did* appear to be insubstantial as a disembodied intelligence should be.

Naturally, he did not. There wasn't a trace of haziness to his shape. He sat there in the chair the way a flesh and blood being should, and any illusion of lack of bodily opacity could be set down to the indistinct lighting of the room.

"What do you expect to do with your formula, in a broad way?" I asked him gravely.

"How do you mean?"

"Why," I said, "it seems to me you could make a fortune on it. Workmen could buy it and send their bodies to do their work for them. Husbands could buy it and remain bodily faithful to their wives, in the meantime attending all sorts of secret orgies. Hosts and hostesses could catch up on their entertaining, and coincidentally could be enjoying a good theater. I might even purchase a few bottles myself," I added. "I have several uses in mind. . . ."

"I'm not going to do anything commercial with it," he responded seriously. "I don't need the money, and I don't think it would be a good idea for the world in general. Already we have far too many things done in a disinterested, mechanical way,"

"You're content, then, to utilize your marvelous drug only as a cure for social boredom?"

"Oh, no," he protested. "Eventually I'm going to do great things with it. And when I die, I'll will it to science,"

"I see," I said vaguely. There wasn't much else to say.

In his eye appeared that pensive, far-off look that had preceded his previous hasty exit.

"I'm going to have to run along in a minute or two," he said. "Watch me closely this time. You'll see that at one instant I'm here in this chair, and the next instant I've left you,"

I resolved to take him at his word. I would watch him—and closely!

In order to do it the better I reached behind me for the light switch on the lamp stand, intending to illuminate the procedure more clearly and give him the maximum difficulty in performing his amateur disappearing act.

The switch eluded my fingers and I turned my head a moment to see what I was doing. When I turned back John was gone.

THREE days later John visited me again. This time he was not so careful with the door catch, for I distinctly heard it click as he entered. He walked noiselessly, but solidly, to the chair opposite the window, and sat down. It seemed to me he looked distressed.

"How's the magician today?" I asked. "Is your disembodied health all it should be?"

He winced. "Don't rag me," he said. "I'm not in the mood for it. My experiment has led me into serious trouble."

"What's happened?" I inquired. "Did your body go lie down in a cemetery and get itself buried, or something?"

He moved his hand petulantly. "This is a serious matter,"

"Well, I don't know anything graver than mistaken burial——"

"It's all due to my lack of forethought," he said. "I should have realized what might happen. You see, in the very nature of things, man, bereft of his intelligence, is a primitive and irresponsible animal apt to do almost any senseless thing. I ought to have taken that into consideration,"

"Have you committed murder without knowing it?"

"I did something almost as serious," he said with a sigh. "Yesterday afternoon at the Regatta I proposed to May Strath-Wheeting! I didn't know a thing about it, of course. When it was time to come home I projected my intelligence back into my body, and said good-night to her. I said it no more intimately than usual. I thought she looked surprized and hurt at my formality. Then, just a few minutes ago she called me and reminded me that I had asked her to marry me. Told me all about it. And from the way she talked, I assume she accepted with pleasure,"

He shook his head.

"Now what am I going to do?" he complained. "I don't want to marry anybody, least of all May. She's nice enough, but certainly not my kind of a girl. But, really, you know, I don't see what I am to do about it. How do you suppose I can get out of it?"

"You might tell her how you came to propose," I suggested. "Tell her you weren't yourself. Tell her about your chemical experiment." There was more than a trace of a sneer in my voice. I couldn't understand, nor did I like, the way he was talking about a girl he thought enough of to propose to.

"I couldn't do that," he said earnestly. "If I told her the truth she'd think I was crazy,"

"I'm inclined to that opinion myself," I said. And I told him about what I thought of a man who would continue a joke at the expense of his future wife.

"Will you never get over the fool conviction that this is a joke!" he burst out. "I tell you I really have invented a drug that will separate my dual personality. Also I swear to you that I have taken that drug several times—that my disembodied intelligence has been in this very room with you. And yesterday my unguided body, without my permission, got itself entangled with a girl of whom I myself do not approve at all."

He was so very serious about it that, even while I knew he was lying, I made a pretext to do what I'd really felt like doing before: I walked over near him—and touched him.

He was as solid as I am.

"Oh, it's me this time," he answered the thought implied in my move. "I don't dare trust my body alone any more. . . ."

"Your purple silk robe seems real, too," I said. "I thought you told me it was just a conception?"

"I went around and bought it a few days ago," he replied absently. "If you'll notice, the lapels are different today. When I imagined it on me, I imagined it with a different cut lapel. I'd forgotten the exact details of it——"

My face must have given away my skepticism and a certain amount of coolness. He got really angry.

"You are the most stubborn fool I have ever had the privilege of meeting," he flared out, rising from his chair. "You're the only person I know I've thought enough of to confide in. And this is the way you receive my confidence. You can be very sure I won't bother you again!"

He went out, slamming the door behind him with a vehemence that, for him, was almost as incredible as his story.

I DIDN'T see him any more. Now and then I could hear him moving around the floor above, but he kept to himself. A few weeks later he moved to his stepfather's big home.

I read an announcement of his engagement to May Strath-Wheeting in the newspapers, and, later, saw an account of the wedding in the society column.

Six months passed then, with no word from him. I would have liked to hear

from him. I was sorry he had gone away so angrily. And many times I had thought about his wild tale—the golden elixir that he said had separated his personality. I had long ago decided that he wasn't entirely joking; his manner surely could not have been so consistently serious if the whole affair was a jest.

But, if he wasn't joking—then what? Had he really invented such a drug? Had a dilettante chemist found a secret that any outstanding scientific genius would have been awed to discover? But I refused to believe this, naturally. Although I know nothing of chemistry, I claim some share of common sense, and I could not bring myself to swallow John's account.

Nevertheless I wished he would come in and see me again. And, one afternoon when the door catch clicked with suggestive softness, I spun around in my chair expecting, hoping, to see his face.

It was not John Lancellar. It was a visitor who afforded me much greater astonishment. It was John's wife!

For several seconds May hesitated in the doorway, smiling at me with a certain timidity as though she had come to do something that required great courage and was reluctant to begin.

"Hello," she said at length, coming into the room and taking a chair I offered her.

For a little while she talked pleasantly but at random, in the manner of one who is striving hard for self-composure. Then, finally, she forced herself to mention the subject of her call. Her reluctance was explained when it became evident that she was to speak of her domestic life.

"It's awful to talk about one's husband to somebody on whom one has so few claims," she murmured. "I wouldn't dream of doing such a thing ordinarily. And if John ever found out——"

I assured her he never would, at least from my lips.

"You see," she went on with a rush, "you're such a good friend of his. Anyway he speaks of you often. And you are the only one he ever mentions in connection with the—the drug."

I started at that, and stared at her.

"What drug?" I asked cautiously.

"The yellow stuff," she said. "Oh, you needn't be afraid to give him away or anything. I appreciate your tact, but I know he has told you all about it."

She was silent for a moment, as if she were trying to arrange a painful proceeding into some kind of methodical order.

"I must begin," she said at last, "by confessing that I have never been able to understand John. He seems to be two different men. One day he is a simple, amiable person who is willing to play golf or tennis or go to a house party as all our set do. And the very next day he may change entirely and be silent, morose, annoyed at our whole condition of society life. One of his changes happened, incidentally, the very time we got engaged. When he proposed to me he was nice, though he did seem a trifle absent-minded. And the very next day he was as different as he could be! He seemed not to know exactly what he had done——"

Her lips quivered in a smile that pleaded comprehension.

"This is terrible," she murmured, "this frank confession to you. But I am hoping you can help me to understand him."

I nodded encouragingly.

"This drug," she said in a low tone; "I think it has something to do with his bewildering change of personality. Whenever he takes it he becomes a different man. From being morose and impatient with me, he becomes the amiable, not-

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THE MESSAGE

By CLINTON DANGERFIELD

An utterly strange story of the radio message received in the death cell by a man condemned to die for murder

BOLTON, chaplain for a famous gray-walled prison, hesitated. His blue, honest eyes clouded and his big, broad, kindly face reflected his unwillingness to speak.

"I might tell you," he said. "Yes, I might tell you about it if you will promise that the revelation I make will go no further."

"But I do want it to go further," I answered. "The world ought to know the truth about these things. We all have a vital interest in them. I want this for publication and it's hardly fair in you to hold back what, in a way, belongs to the human race."

Then, as he still hung fire, I said coaxingly, "If you'll do it I'll not give any of the real names. I'll change them all, even the name of the prison and the locality."

At that his face brightened. He stuck his feet out to the little fire in my den and said, with a sigh:

"When young Gordon McMorrow killed his man there were so many extenuating circumstances that it was generally expected the jury would bring in a verdict of 'Not Guilty,' or, at worst, a verdict of manslaughter. But his friends had not reckoned sufficiently with the fact that Gordon McMorrow, in the defense of another, had not killed an ordinary citizen. He had shot down the son of a plutocrat whose money, like an invisible corruption, flowed in devious and hidden channels through the whole state. Some of that golden and damning flood undoubtedly crept into the pockets of the jury. Gordon McMorrow was bought and sold. The jury brought in a verdict of murder in the first degree."

"Was there no appeal to the governor?" I asked.

"There was a frantic appeal made," returned Bolton, "but the governor unfortunately was the uncle of the boy who was killed. There were those who believed that such is the uprightness and dispassionate courage of the governor that he might pardon Gordon McMorrow. But as one day passed after another and one week after another, the time narrowed down to the final day and yet there was neither pardon nor reprieve.

"Gordon McMorrow didn't want to die. Who does? And he was young, sound in wind and limb, optimistic in disposition, and gifted with an ability sure to make his way in the world. The killing he'd done had been done in the chivalrous protection of another. Those who claimed it was otherwise were nothing less than the paid verbal assassins hired by the dead man's father.

"So I hoped to the last day for the pardon. But as the hours in that final day flashed by I was finally obliged to go to Gordon McMorrow and tell him that that there was no hope.

"He walked over to his cell window and looked out. Then he called me to come to him and pointed to a flamevine hanging from a wire. If you have never seen one of them you can not realize how the vine, dropping from its support, weaves and interweaves, until it has produced a cloth of flaming blossoms.

"Gordon McMorrow said, gasping thickly, 'Look out there. The world's

just fiery with life and you tell me that I'm about to be snuffed out into nothingness.'

" 'I didn't say that, Gordon,' I answered. 'You know that I don't believe any such stuff as that. The immortal longings planted in a man's soul are, in themselves, not so much longings as they are an instinct common to every race and every caste, put there to teach trust in the future.'

"He made a despairing gesture and was silent. A long shudder ran through him; then his face settled into resolute lines of courageous composure.

"The death watch, stupid, gross-bodied, but not unkindly, suggested in his flat voice, 'Chaplain, mebbe ef you turn on the radio for him it would pass the time.'

" 'Don't turn that damned thing on!' McMorrow said fiercely.

"The death watch subsided.

"I didn't wonder McMorrow hated the radio, although the warden had meant well in putting the set there for the condemned man's use. Truth was, all of us prison officials had been attracted to Gordon McMorrow. We hated to see him die.

"Staring at the radio I thought that it was no wonder he did not want to hear it. Why should a man with only the horror of the grave before him want to have jazz coming into his cell, mocking him with those human interests in which he had no further concern?

"Standing with my eyes fixed upon the radio I started; for suddenly I saw the control snap from one side to the other, precisely as though some electric force had pushed it.

"I flashed a look at the death watch. He had heard the little click that it made and had turned his head sharply toward the radio. Then, evidently fancying it was really his imagination or some little snapping noise outside, he turned away his gaze and resumed his mechanical staring at the prisoner.

"GORDON MCMORROW had turned from the window at the sound of the control's little click. Looking at me he said, a trifle reproachfully, 'Bolton, I asked you *not* to turn that on!'

" 'I didn't,' I explained hastily.

"And then, thinking how foolish it would seem to try and make him believe what had happened, and half inclined to think that I had imagined the whole thing, I strode over to the machine just as a very faint sound of music began to come from it — jazz music at that. I snapped off the control and walked over to the window where he stood.

"He turned back and stood there with one strong brown hand on the lower bar. I saw the muscles contract and stand out as though he would gladly have torn that bar from its place with the last ounce of strength that was in him. There was silence in the room. Neither of us said anything. What was there to say? For when you get up against these last great issues the pretty platitudes which men scatter so readily under the ordinary circumstances of life become worse than chaff before the wind. In that disturbing silence my auditory nerves strained to catch something on which to rest. I began to hear the breathing of the death watch, and then once more I heard the sharp click of the control!

"Because of my focused attention it sounded louder this time. Both Gordon McMorrow and myself whirled at the same time, for both heard it, and we turned so quickly after the sound came that it was evident to both of us that the death watch had nothing to do with it. He was at the other end of the cell, sitting on his stool near the door, with one leg crossed over the other, leaning back

against the wall and looking stupid and sleepy.

"Gordon McMorrow said, 'That's funny!'

" 'Must be something wrong with the machinery inside,' I volunteered. 'I know nothing about the internal arrangements of radios.'

"He shook his head. 'No,' he said, 'it couldn't be that. There's nothing in there to make that control snap from side to side. It has to be moved by an outside force.'

" 'Perhaps we just imagined it,' I said, taking a step further toward the machine.

"Gordon McMorrow's voice followed me. 'Yes,' he said; 'turn it off. Maybe it won't happen again. I don't want any of that infernal jazz coming in.'

"I took another step, pondering the matter as I went, and then I stopped, for into the cell came a voice which was not a voice. It was so poignantly sweet that it was more like music which had become words. And yet those words were extremely distinct.

" 'A hard time,' it said. 'A hard time . . . getting through . . . a hard time fighting for wave control . . . had to push them all away . . . don't turn it off again . . . very difficult to get wave control. . . .'

"I heard a gasping exclamation of surprize behind me from Gordon McMorrow. He was at my side in a bound, clutching my arm. He did not need to tell me not to touch the radio. The look on his face was enough.

"But whose was the voice which could so arrest and fascinate him? Unmistakably the voice was a woman's, but also unmistakably it had in it a quality of sweetness that was so perfect and so piercing that it became to me almost painful. It continued:

" 'It was just a little while ago that I got the power for this . . . the power to get the wave control. . . . Don't turn it off again . . . something might interfere. . . . This is a message of life and death. . . .'

"Whoever was speaking, she need not have feared that anyone in that cell would turn the control off just then. Gordon McMorrow and I were listening as though we had no other sense but hearing. The tones resumed, the piercing quality of their sweetness getting more and more painful, as they grew stronger, in their disturbing music.

" 'I only got free a little while ago,' it continued. 'This is my first chance to come to your aid, Gordon. . . . I needn't tell you who is speaking . . . you've known from the very first that it was I . . . Alma Fielding. . . .'

"So that was the owner of this amazing honey-and-fire voice, Alma Fielding, the girl whom Gordon McMorrow was to have married. I said to myself that with tones like those she could make her fortune over the radio; for, although the voice in a strange way actually hurt me, I felt that I could go on listening to it forever.

"I heard Gordon McMorrow mutter at my side with a sort of frenzied whisper, 'Yes, yes, Alma . . . of course I knew. . . . Go on. . . .'

" 'This is an issue of life and death,' continued the voice hurriedly. 'That gave me strength, Gordon . . . to fight the control of the waves. It was very hard . . . it is hard now . . . but this is a matter of life and death. . . . You get that, don't you, Gordon?'

" 'Yes, yes, Alma,' he repeated, 'I do get it. Go on.'

" 'But what is life?' the tones continued. 'And what is death? I never knew until a little while ago. . . . I'm going to leave it to you whether you want to stay down there in the fighting . . .

the turmoil. . . . You can stay if you'd rather!'

"He gasped out, as though he believed the voice could hear him, 'What do you mean, Alma darling . . . *that I can stay?*'

" 'I mean that you can keep your body if you want to, Gordon. Keep alive the body which they intend to kill. You can live in it until you are very, very old . . . then time will kill it. Time keeps it going, but of course time will destroy it . . . down there everything is controlled by time.'

"WHAT on earth was she talking about, I wondered? And why did she keep him uncertain and in suspense in regard to whatever she had to say of real importance? Or was she talking as lovers talk, just wanting to be certain that he heard her voice as long as it was possible? Just pretending to have something of importance to communicate when all she really had was the somewhat dubious comfort of that voice of honey and of fire, which would surely stir him into a frenzied horror of death, a desire for life so strong he might go mad under it.

"The voice resumed, 'You see, Gordon, I got away . . . from time . . . I——'

"Here the voice uttered a little strangled cry, and then, 'Oh!' it said, and again, more faintly, '*Oh!*'

"And suddenly over the radio came in the harsh, rapid banalities of a singing comedian. Hideous enough his voice sounded after hers. . . . And then came other voices . . . so that a strange medley floated into the cell. Now and then we heard her strangely sweet voice, fighting for supremacy:

" 'Gordon . . . Gordon' . . . Then maybe '*Atchison preferred*' . . . or maybe '*This is WJZ . . . we shall now offer you*' . . . and again her voice, 'Gordon . . . oh, I am trying. . . .' Then, very faintly, 'Send me your love . . . believe in me . . . believe I can get through. . . .'

" 'I do believe,' he declared in firm tones, his eyes alight with faith and fire.

"A bass voice boomed into the cell, '*International Paper eighty-four*' . . . but this market information was suddenly extinguished by the clarion strength of her tones, triumphantly flooding the cell:

"I got your thought-wave, Gordon . . . it doubled my strength . . . Gordon, the Governor's conscience drove him into pardoning you. . . .'

"Gordon McMorrow started. A wild flash of relief sprang into his bronzed face. He cried out:

" 'Yes, Alma . . . *yes* . . . go on, darling.'

"She answered his appeal in a steady stream of sentences, almost unbroken now:

" 'The Governor's messenger is coming, Gordon, with the pardon. Driving furiously. Taking every short cut that he can. This messenger had orders to wire ahead. But one of your enemies got him drunk. They stopped him from wiring by pretending that they had sent the wire themselves. But they failed. Just because he is drunk the messenger is driving faster than ever.

" 'Very soon he will take another short cut. But if he does this the pardon won't get to you in time to stop the execution, because the river is up and foaming. The bridge is going . . . it's going now . . . it's gone. So if the messenger goes that way he'll have to stop and then make a circuit to get back to another bridge and it will be too late. . . . But I can turn him, Gordon. I can get into his mind and change it.'

" '*I can get into his mind and change it!*' What on earth did this girl mean?

"But Gordon McMorrow evidently

didn't hear that last queer sentence of hers. He cried out, crushing his hands together, a cold sweat springing to his forehead:

" 'Save me, Alma——'

" 'You'll decide, Gordon,' rushed on the voice, with the same clarion strength and poignant beauty. 'You see, there was a wreck. Nearly a dozen of us got free. . . . It was just a little while ago. Not an hour. At first I didn't know how to use my power. But one came . . . she said I helped her centuries ago. I don't understand yet how . . . but that's no matter. . . . The thing is, what is life and what is death?'

" 'Alma — *darling* — where are you? *Where are you?*'

" 'Gordon, if your body is saved, if you live on down there, you can't ever find me. Not until you're very, very old and time kills off your body for you. But if I don't turn the messenger into the right road, you'll get out of that body you live in. You'll find me today. *Today,* Gordon!'

"IT CAME to me suddenly that this Alma Fielding had in some way gotten control of the sound waves and was using them, cleverly enough, to make this poor boy feel that, if he were hung, he would be going to death of his own accord and going to her! She was fooling him thoroughly while apparently giving him a choice. She was, of course, very much on earth herself! All this talk about the pardon was just a tale to make him happy at the last.

"I studied Gordon McMorrow's face and I saw on it at one moment an illuminating and transfixing love and in another that struggling instinct for self-preservation which lives in the flesh and is its most deeply rooted desire.

"She was doing her fooling too well! He'd choose to be saved — and then wouldn't be! At the last bitter moment he would know that she had lied to him! I hated this girl whom I'd never seen. Hated her violently.

" 'I am allowed this because They tell me that you and I have finished with our training there . . . that years have nothing to do with it. . . . It would make no difference in character when we leave now. That's why they let me get out. That's why you can either stay or come to me. . . . You can have happiness now or you can have it when you've worn out what you are living in.'

"God—what a voice she had! Those tones of hers were such exquisite vibrations that they actually thrilled and shook me with a sensuous ecstasy of pleasure, stabbingly sweet. Waves of tonal power . . . why, I almost believed her myself even while I knew she was tricking Gordon McMorrow!

"I looked at the death watch. I never saw a man more mystified and confused. I found out afterward that to him the voice was merely a peculiar kind of music, such as he had never heard before. He could distinguish no words in it whatever, but the tonal beauty and power he could feel. Even a dumb brute would have thrilled to that voice!

"Then I realized that she'd actually accomplished what she had tried to accomplish! For suddenly I heard the voice of Gordon McMorrow saying steadily and in a tone nearly as joyous as hers:

" *'I'll come to you, Alma!'*

"A long silence followed. The rapt look remained on McMorrow's face. He went to the window again and looked out —but there was exultation in his stride!

"Before I could resolve what to do when he should come back to me — whether to pretend I believed that voice or just to keep a merciful silence, a key turned in the barred door.

"The warden had come for Gordon McMorrow—the death hour had struck.

"McMorrow died so serenely, even so joyously, that when all was over and we had left the death chamber one of the press representatives came up to me and congratulated me.

" 'Mr. Bolton,' he said, 'I've always heard that you were a wonderful chaplain and that you have a great effect on the men. I'm no believer in survival myself, but I'd give a lot to have such faith as you hypnotized into McMorrow! . . . I don't mean that word "hypnotize" unfavorably,' he added hastily. 'I just mean——'

"We were interrupted by the approach of the warden. He came up to me, white and shaking, with a paper in his hand. He said, in a low and bitter tone:

" 'The irony of it! The devilish irony of it! *Here's a pardon for Gordon McMorrow from the Governor. It came just too late!*'

"I gasped: 'A pardon . . . too late . . . *then she wasn't lying!*'

"The warden said sympathetically, for he hadn't understood my last words, 'I know it's a shock to you, Mr. Bolton. You'd grown to love that boy as I did. It's horrible! It's just damn horrible!'

" 'I should say it's illuminating,' said the press representative dryly. 'It shows plainly enough what a fool idea it is to suppose there are any supreme intelligences looking after men.'

"The death watch, who was standing near us, scratched his head.

" 'I don't know,' he said, in complexity and confusion, 'but there *was* something awful funny happened in Gordon McMorrow's cell just a few minutes before the warden came for him.'

" 'What was it?' demanded the press representative, producing a ready pad and pencil.

" 'Why, the radio went on of itself and some awful queer music come through,' the death watch replied.

" 'And you had an awful queer drink,' said the press representative, good-humoredly, and went away.

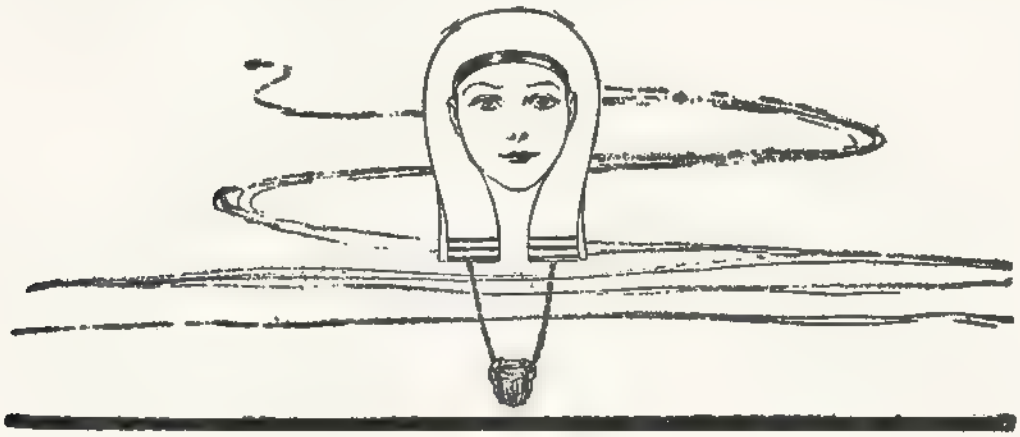
"I left the jail and walked out into the sunshine. I wanted a chance to think. Scarcely had I gotten outside when a small boy rushed by me crying:

" 'Extry! Extry! All about the wreck!'

"I bought a paper, but before I looked at the headlines I knew what I was going to see:

RAILROAD COLLISION! ELEVEN DEAD!"

"Then, prominent among the list of those killed, I saw, 'Alma Fielding, age nineteen.' "



SATAN'S STEPSON

By SEABURY QUINN

A tale of the Black Mass—an eery adventure of Jules de Grandin and Doctor Trowbridge—a story of the Undead

1. The Living Dead

"HORNS of a little blue devil!" Jules de Grandin bent his head against the sleet-laden February wind and clutched madly at my elbow as his feet all but slipped from under him. "We are three fools, my friends. We should be home beside our cheerful fire instead of risking our necks going to this *sacré* dinner on such a night."

"Comment ça va, mon Jules," demanded Inspector Renouard, "where is your patriotism? Tonight's dinner is in honor of the great General Washington, whose birthday it is. Did not our own so illustrious Marquis de Lafayette——"

"Monsieur le Marquis is dead, and we are like to be the same before we find our way home again," de Grandin cut in irritably. "As for the great Washington, I think no more of him for choosing this so villainous month in which to be born. Now me, I selected May for my *début;* had he but used a like discretion——"

"Misère de Dieu, see him come! He is a crazy fool, that one!" Renouard broke in, pointing to a motor car racing toward us down the avenue.

We watched the vehicle in open-mouthed astonishment. To drive at all on such a night was risking life and limb, yet this man drove as though contending for a record on the racing track. Almost abreast of us, he applied his brakes and swerved sharply to the left, seeking to enter the cross street. The inevitable happened. With a rending of wood and metal the car skidded end for end and brought up against the curb, its right rear wheel completely dished, its motor racing wildly as the rimless spokes spun round and round.

"Mordieu, you are suicidal, my friend!" de Grandin cried, making his way toward the disabled vehicle with difficulty. "Can I assist you? I am a physician, and——"

A woman's hysterical scream cut through his offer. "Help—save me—they're——" Her cry died suddenly as a hand was clapped over her mouth, and a hulking brute of a man in chauffeur's leather coat and vizored cap scrambled from the driver's cab and faced the Frenchman truculently. *"Yékhat!* Be off!" he ordered shortly. "We need no help, and——"

"Don't parley with him, Dmitri!" a heavy voice inside the tonneau commanded. "Break his damned neck and——"

"'Cré nom! With whose assistance will you break my neck, *cochon?"* de Grandin asked sharply. "Name of a gun, make but one step toward me, and——"

The giant chauffeur needed no further invitation. As de Grandin spoke he hurled himself forward, his big hands outstretched to grasp the little Frenchman's throat. Like a bouncing ball de Grandin rose from the ground, intent on meeting the bully's rush with a kick to the pit of the stomach, for he was an expert at the French art of foot-boxing, but the slippery pavement betrayed him. Both feet flew upward and he sprawled upon his back, helpless before the larger man's attack.

"A moi, mon Georges!" he called Renouard. *"Je suis perdu!"*

"I took the candle-lantern and flashed its feeble light into the coffin."

Practical policeman that he was, Renouard lost no time in answering de Grandin's cry. Reversing the heavy walking-stick which swung from his arm he brought its lead-loaded crook down upon the chauffeur's head with sickening force, then bent to extricate his friend from the other's crushing bulk.

"The car, into the *moteur*, my friend!" de Grandin cried. "A woman is in there; injured, perhaps; perhaps——"

Together they dived through the open door of the limousine's tonneau, and a moment later there came the sound of scuffling and mingled grunts and curses as they fought desperately with some invisible antagonist.

I rushed to help them, slipped upon the sleet-glazed sidewalk, and sprawled full length as a dark body hurtled from the car, cannoned into me and paused a moment to hurl a missile, then sped away into the shadows with a mocking laugh.

"Quick, Friend Trowbridge, assist me; Renouard is hit!" de Grandin emerged from the wrecked car supporting the Inspector on his arm.

"*Zut!* It is nothing—a scratch!" Renouard returned. "Do you attend to her, my friend. Me, I can walk with ease. Observe——" he took a step and collapsed limply in my arms, blood streaming from a deeply incised wound in his left shoulder.

Together de Grandin and I staunched the hemorrhage as best we could, then rummaged in the ruined car for the woman whose screams we had heard when the accident occurred.

"She is unconscious but otherwise unhurt, I think," de Grandin told me. "Do you see to Georges; I will carry her—*prie-Dieu* I do not slip and kill us both!"

"But what about this fellow?" I asked, motioning toward the unconscious chauffeur. "We oughtn't leave him here. He may freeze or contract pneumonia——"

"*Eh bien*, one can but hope," de Grandin interrupted. "Let him lie, my friend. The sleet may cool his ardor—he who was so intent on breaking Jules de Grandin's neck. Come, it is but a short distance to the house. Let us be upon our way; *allez-vous-en!*"

A RUGGED constitution and the almost infinite capacity for bearing injury which he had developed during years of service with the gendarmerie stood Inspector Renouard in good stead. Before we had reached the house he was able to walk with my assistance; by the time he had had a proper pack and bandage applied to his wound and absorbed the better part of a pint of brandy he was almost his usual debonair self.

Not so our other patient. Despite our treatment with cold compresses, sal volatilis and aromatic ammonia it was nearly half an hour before we could break the profound swoon in which she lay, and even then she was so weak and shaken we forbore to question her.

At length, when a slight tinge of color began to show in her pale cheeks de Grandin took his station before her and bowed as formally as though upon a ballroom floor. "*Mademoiselle,*" he began, "some half an hour since we had the happy privilege of assisting you from a motor wreck. This is Doctor Samuel Trowbridge, in whose office you are; I am Doctor Jules de Grandin, and this is our very good friend, Inspector Georges Jean Jacques Joseph-Marie Renouard, of the *Sûreté Générale*, all of us entirely at your service. If *Mademoiselle* will be so kind as to tell us how we may communicate with her friends or family we shall esteem it an honor——"

"Donald!" the young woman interrupted breathlessly. "Call Donald and tell him I'm all right!"

"*Avec plaisir,*" he agreed with another

bow. "And this Monsieur Donald, he is who, if you please?"

"My husband."

"Perfectly, *Madame.* But his name?"

"Donald Tanis. Call him at the Hotel Avalon and tell him that I—that Sonia is all right, and where I am, please. Oh, he'll be terribly worried!"

"But certainly, *Madame,* I fully understand," he assured her. Then:

"You have been through a most unpleasant experience. Perhaps you will be kind enough to permit that we offer you refreshment—some sherry and biscuit—while *Monsieur* your husband comes to fetch you? He is even now upon his way."

"Thank you so much," she nodded with a wan little smile, and I hastened to the pantry in search of wine and biscuit.

Seated in an easy-chair before the study fire, the girl sipped a glass of Duff Gordon and munched a pilot biscuit while de Grandin, Renouard and I studied her covertly. She was quite young—not more than thirty, I judged—and lithe and slender in stature, though by no means thin, and her hands were the whitest I had ever seen. Ash-blond her complexion was, her skin extremely fair and her hair that peculiar shade of lightness which, without being gray, is nearer silver than gold. Her eyes were bluish gray, sad, knowing and weary, as though they had seen the sorrow and futility of life from the moment of their first opening.

"You will smoke, perhaps?" de Grandin asked as she finished her biscuit. As he extended his silver pocket lighter to her cigarette the bell shrilled imperatively and I hastened to the front door to admit a tall, dark young man whose agitated manner labeled him our patient's husband even before he introduced himself.

"My dear!" he cried, rushing across the study and taking the girl's hand in his, then raising it to his lips while de Grandin and Renouard beamed approvingly. "Where—how——" he faltered in his question, but his worshipful glance was eloquent.

"Donald," the girl broke in, and though the study was almost uncomfortably warm she shuddered with a sudden chill, *"it was Konstantin!"*

"Wha—*what?"* he stammered in incredulous, horrified amazement. "My dear, you surely can't be serious. Why, he's *dead!"*

"No, dear," she answered wearily, "I'm not jesting. It was Konstantin. There's no mistaking it. He tried to kidnap me.

"Just as I entered the hotel dining-room a waiter told me that a gentleman wanted to see me in the lobby; so, as I knew you had to finish dressing, I went out to him. A big, bearded man in a chauffeur's leather uniform was waiting by the door. He told me he was from the Cadillac agency; said you had ordered a new car as a surprize for my birthday, but that you wanted me to approve it before they made delivery. It was waiting outside, he said, and he would be glad if I'd just step out and look at it.

"His accent should have warned me, for I recognized him as a Russian, but there are so many different sorts of people in this country, and I was so surprized and delighted with the gift that I never thought of being suspicious. So I went out with him to a gorgeous new limousine parked about fifty feet from the porte-cochère. The engine was running, but I didn't notice that till later.

"I walked round the car, admiring it from the outside; then he asked if I'd care to inspect the inside of the tonneau. There seemed to be some trouble with the dome light when he opened the door for me, and I was half-way in before I realized some one was inside. Then it was too late. The chauffeur shoved me in and slammed the door, then jumped into the cab and set the machine going in high

gear. I never had a chance to call for help.

"It wasn't till we'd gone some distance that my companion spoke, and when he did I almost died of fright. There was no light, and he was so muffled in furs that I could not have recognized his face anyway, but his voice—and those corpse-hands of his—I knew them! It was Konstantin.

" '*Jawohl, meine liebe Frau,*' he said—he always loved to speak German to torment me—'it seems we meet again, *nicht wahr?*'

"I tried to answer him, to say something—anything—but my lips and tongue seemed absolutely paralyzed with terror. Even though I could not see, I could *feel* him chuckling in that awful, silent way of his.

"Just then the driver tried to take a curve at high speed and we skidded into the curb. These gentlemen were passing and I screamed to them for help. Konstantin put his hand over his mouth, and at the touch of his cold flesh against my lips I fainted. The next I knew I was here and Doctor de Grandin was offering to call you, so——" She paused and drew her husband's hand down against her cheek. "I'm frightened, Donald—terribly frightened," she whimpered. "Konstantin——"

Jules de Grandin could stand the strain no longer. During Mrs. Tanis' recital I could fairly see his ungovernable curiosity bubbling up within him; now he was at the end of his endurance.

"*Pardonnez-moi, Madame,*" he broke in, "but may one inquire who this so offensive Konstantin is?"

The girl shuddered again, and her pale cheeks went a thought paler.

"He—he is my husband," she whispered between blenched lips.

"But, *Madame,* how can it be?" Renouard broke in. "Monsieur Tanis, he is your husband, he admits it, so do you; yet this Konstantin, he is also your husband. *Non,* my comprehension is unequal to it."

"But Konstantin is *dead,* I tell you," her husband insisted. "I saw him die—I saw him in his coffin——"

"Oh, my darling," she sobbed, her lips blue with unholy terror, "you saw *me* dead—coffined and buried, too—but I'm living. Somehow, in some way we don't understand——"

"*Comment?*" Inspector Renouard took his temples in his hands as though suffering a violent headache. "Jules, my friend, tell me I can not understand the English," he implored. "You are a physician; examine me and tell me my faculties are failing, my ears betraying me! I hear them say, I think, that Madame Tanis has died and been buried in a grave and coffin; yet there she sits and——"

"Silence, *mon singe,* your jabbering annoys one!" de Grandin cut him short. To Tanis he continued:

"We should be grateful for an explanation, if you care to offer one, for *Madame's* so strange statement has greatly puzzled us. It is perhaps she makes the pleasantry at our expense, or——"

"It's no jest, I assure you, sir," the girl broke in. "I *was* dead. My death and burial are recorded in the official archives of the city of Paris, and a headboard marks my grave in Saint Sébastien, but Donald came for me and married——"

"*Eh bien, Madame,* either my hearing falters or my intellect is dull," de Grandin exclaimed. "Will you repeat your statement once again, slowly and distinctly, if you please? Perhaps I did not fully apprehend you."

2. *Inferno*

DESPITE herself the girl smiled. "What I said is literally true," she assured him. A pause, then: "We hate to

talk of it, for the memory horrifies us both, but you gentlemen have been so kind I think we owe you an explanation.

"My name was Sonia Malakoff. I was born in Petrograd, and my father was a colonel of infantry in the Imperial Army, but some difficulty with a superior officer over the discipline of the men led to his retirement. I never understood exactly what the trouble was, but it must have been serious, for he averted court-martial and disgrace only by resigning his commission and promising to leave Russia forever.

"We went to England, for Father had friends there. We had sufficient property to keep us comfortable, and I was brought up as an English girl of the better class.

"When the War broke out Father offered his sword to Russia, but his services were peremptorily refused, and though he was bitterly hurt by the rebuff, he determined to do something for the Allied cause, and so we moved to France and he secured a noncombatant commission in the French Army. I went out as a V. A. D. with the British.

"One night in '16 as our convoy was going back from the advanced area an air attack came and several of our ambulances were blown off the road. I detoured into a field and put on all the speed I could. As I went bumping over the rough ground I heard some one groaning in the darkness. I stopped and got down to investigate and found a group of Canadians who had been laid out by a bomb. All but two were dead and one of the survivors had a leg blown nearly off, but I managed to get them into my van with my other *blessés* and crowded on all the gas I could for the dressing-station.

"Next day they told me one of the men —the poor chap with the mangled leg— had died, but the other, though badly shell-shocked, had a good chance of recovery. They were very nice about it all, gave me a mention for bringing them in, and all that sort of thing. Captain Donald Tanis, the shell-shocked man, was an American serving with the Canadians. I went to see him, and he thanked me for giving him the lift. Afterward they sent him to a recuperation station on the Riviera, and we corresponded regularly, or as regularly as people can in such circumstances, until——" she paused a moment, and a slight flush tinged her pallid face.

"Bien oui," de Grandin agreed with a delighted grin. "It was love by correspondence, *n'est-ce-pas, Madame?* And so you were married? Yes?"

"Not then," she answered. "Donald's letters became less frequent, and—and of course I did what any girl would have done in the circumstances, made mine shorter, cooler and farther apart. Finally our correspondence dwindled away entirely.

"The second revolution had taken place in Russia and her new masters had betrayed the Allies at Brest-Litovsk. But America had come into the war and things began to look bright for us, despite the Bolsheviks' perfidy. Father should have been delighted at the turn events were taking, but apparently he was disappointed. When the Allies made their July drive in '18 and the Germans began retreating he seemed terribly disturbed about something, became irritable or moody and distrait, often going days without speaking a word that wasn't absolutely necessary.

"We'd picked up quite a few friends among the *émigrés* in Paris, and Father's most intimate companion was Alexis Konstantin, who soon became a regular visitor at our house. I always hated him. There was something dreadfully repulsive about his appearance and manner— his dead-white face, his flabby, fish-cold

hands, the very way he dressed in black and walked about so silently—he was like a living dead man. I had a feeling of almost physical nausea whenever he came near me, and once when he laid his hand upon my arm I started and screamed as though a reptile had been put against my flesh.

"When Donald's letters finally ceased altogether, though I wouldn't admit it, even to myself, my heart was breaking. I loved him, you see," she added simply.

"Then one day Father came home from the War Department in a perfect fever of nervousness. 'Sonia,' he told me, 'I have just been examined by the military doctors. They tell me the end may come at any time, like a thief in the night. I want you to be provided for in case it comes soon, my dear. I want you to be married.'

" 'But Father, I don't want to marry,' I replied. 'The war's not over yet, though we are winning, and I've still my work to do with the ambulance section. Besides, we're well enough off to live; there's no question of my having to marry for a home; so——'

" 'But that's just it,' he answered. 'There is. That is exactly the question, my child. I—I've speculated; speculated and lost. Every kopeck we had has gone. I've nothing but my military pay, and when that stops, as it must stop directly the war is won, we're paupers.'

"I was surprized, but far from terrified. 'All right,' I told him, 'I'm strong and healthy and well educated, I can earn a living for us both.'

" 'At what?' he asked sarcastically. 'Typing at seventy shillings a week? As nursery governess at five pounds per month with food and lodging? No, my dear, there's nothing for it but a rich marriage, or at least a marriage with a man able to support us both while I'm alive and keep you comfortably after that.'

"I thought I saw a ray of hope. 'We don't know any such man,' I objected. 'No Frenchman with sufficient fortune to do what you wish will marry a dowerless girl, and our Russian friends are all as poor as we, so——'

" 'Ah, but there *is* such a man,' he smiled. 'I have just the man, and he is willing—no, anxious—to make you his wife.'

"My blood seemed to go cold in my arteries as he spoke, for something inside me whispered the name of this benefactor even before Father pronounced it: Gaspardin Alexis Konstantin!

"I wouldn't hear of it at first; I'd sooner wear my fingers out as seamstress, scrub tiles upon my knees or walk the pavements as a *fille de joie* than marry Konstantin, I told him. But though I was English bred I was Russian born, and Russian women are born to be subservient to men. Though I rebelled against it with every atom of my being, I finally agreed, and so it was arranged that we should marry.

"Father hurried me desperately. At the time I thought it was because he didn't want me to have time to change my mind, but——

"It was a queer wedding day; not at all the kind I'd dreamed of. Konstantin was wealthy, Father said, but there was no evidence of wealth at the wedding. We drove to and from the church in an ancient horse-drawn taximeter cab and my father was my only attendant. An aged *papa* with one very dirty little boy as acolyte performed the ceremony. We had only the cheap silver-gilt crowns owned by the church—none of our own—and not so much as a single spray of flowers for my bridal bouquet.

"THE three of us came home together and Konstantin sent the *concierge* out for liquor. Our wedding breakfast

consisted of brandy, raw fish and tea! Both Father and my husband drank more than they ate. I did neither. The very sight of Konstantin was enough to drive all desire of food away, even though the table had been spread with the choicest dainties to be had from a fashionable caterer.

"Before long, both men were more than half tipsy and began talking together in low, drunken mutterings, ignoring me completely. At last my husband bade me leave the room, ordering me out without so much as looking in my direction.

"I sat in my bedroom in a sort of chilled apathy. I imagine a condemned prisoner who knows all hope of reprieve is passed waits for the coming of the hangman as I waited there.

"My half-consciousness was suddenly broken by Father's voice. 'Sonia, Sonia!' he called, and from his tone I knew he was beside himself with some emotion.

"When I went into the dining-room my father was trembling and wringing his hands in a perfect agony of terror, and tears were streaming down his cheeks as he looked imploringly at Konstantin. 'Sonia, my daughter,' he whispered, 'plead with him. Go on your knees to him, my child, and beg him—pray him as you would pray God, to——'

" 'Shut up, you old fool,' my husband interrupted. 'Shut up and get out—leave me alone with my bride.' He leered drunkenly at me.

"Trembling as though with palsy, my father rose humbly to obey the insolent command, but Konstantin called after him as he went out: 'Best take your *pistolet, mon vieux.* You'll probably prefer it to *le peloton d' exécution.*'

"I heard Father rummaging through his chest in the bedroom and turned on Konstantin. 'What does this mean?' I asked. 'Why did you say he might prefer his own pistol to the firing-party?'

" 'Ask him,' he answered with a laugh, but when I attempted to join my father he thrust me into a chair and held me there. 'Stay where you are,' he ordered. 'I am your master, now.'

"Then my British upbringing asserted itself. 'You're not my master; no one is!' I answered hotly. 'I'm a free woman, not a chattel, and——'

"I never finished. Before I could complete my declaration he'd struck me with his fist and knocked me to the floor, and when I tried to rise he knocked me down again. He even kicked me as I lay there.

"I tried to fight him off, but though he was so slightly built he proved strong as a prize-fighter, and my efforts at defense were futile. They seemed only to arouse him to further fury, and he struck and kicked me again and again. I screamed to my father for help, but if he heard me he made no answer, and so my punishment went on till I lost consciousness.

"My bridal night was an inferno. Sottish with vodka and drunk with passion, Konstantin was a sadistic beast. He tore —actually ripped—my clothing off; covered me with slobbering, drunken caresses from lips to feet, alternating maudlin, obscene compliments with scurrilous insults and abuse, embracing and beating me by turns. Twice I sickened under the ordeal and both times he sat calmly by, drinking raw vodka from the bottle and waiting till my nausea passed, then resumed my torment with all the joy a mediæval Dominican might have found in torturing a helpless heretic.

"It was nearly noon next day when I woke from what was more a stupor of horror and exhaustion than sleep. Konstantin was nowhere to be seen, for which I thanked God as I staggered from the bed and sought a nightrobe to cover the shameless nudity he had imposed on me.

" 'I'll not stand it,' I told myself as, my self-respect somewhat restored by the

garment I'd slipped on, I prepared a bath to wash the wounds and bruises I'd sustained during the night.

"Then all my new-found courage evaporated as I heard my husband's step outside, and I cringed like any odalisk before her master as he entered—groveled on the floor like a dog which fears the whip.

"He laughed and tossed me a copy of the Paris edition of *The Daily Mail*. 'You may be interested in that obituary,' he told me, 'the last paragraph in the fourth column.'

"I read it, and all but fainted as I read, for it told how my father had been found that morning in an obscure street on the left bank. A bullet wound in the head pointed to suicide, but no trace of the weapon had been found, for thieves had taken everything of value and stripped the body almost naked before the gendarmes found it.

"They gave him a military funeral and buried him in a soldier's grave. His service saved him from the Potter's Field, but the army escort and I were his only mourners. Konstantin refused to attend the services and forbade my going till I had abased myself and knelt before him, humbly begging for permission to attend my father's funeral and promising by everything I held sacred that I would be subservient to him in every act and word and thought forever afterward if only he would grant that one poor favor.

"That evening he was drunk again, and most ill-natured. He beat me several times, but offered no endearments, and I was glad of it, for his blows, painful as they were, were far more welcome than his kisses.

"Next morning he abruptly ordered me to rejoin my unit and write him every day, making careful note of the regiments and arms of service to which the wounded men I handled belonged, and reporting to him in detail.

"I SERVED two weeks with my unit, then the Commandant sent for me and told me they were reducing the personnel, and as I was a married woman they deemed it best that I resign at once. 'And by the bye, Konstantin,' she added as I saluted and turned to go, 'you might like to take these with you—as a little souvenir, you know.' She drew a packet from her drawer and handed it to me. It was a sheaf of fourteen letters, every one I'd written to my husband. When I opened them outside I saw that every item of intelligence they contained had been carefully blocked out with censor's ink.

"Konstantin was furious. He thrashed me till I thought I'd not have a whole bone left.

"I took it as long as I could; then, bleeding from nose and lips, I tried to crawl from the room.

"The sight of my helplessness and utter defeat seemed to infuriate him still further. With an animal-snarl he fairly leaped on me and bore me down beneath a storm of blows and kicks.

"I felt the first few blows terribly; then they seemed to soften, as if his hands and feet were encased in thick, soft boxing-gloves. Then I sank face-downward on the floor and seemed to go to sleep.

"WHEN I awoke—if you can call it that—I was lying on the bed, and everything seemed quiet as the grave and calm as Paradise. There was no sensation of pain or any feeling of discomfort, and it seemed to me as if my body had grown curiously lighter. The room was in semi-darkness, and I noticed with an odd feeling of detachment that I could see out of only one eye, my left. 'He must have closed the right one with a blow,' I told myself, but, queerly, I didn't feel resentful. Indeed, I scarcely felt at all. I was in a sort of semi-stupor, indifferent to myself and everything else.

"A scuffle of heavily booted feet sounded outside; then the door was pushed open and a beam of light came into the room, but did not reach to me. I could tell several men had entered, and from their heavy breathing and the scraping sounds I heard, I knew they were lugging some piece of heavy furniture.

" 'Has the doctor been here yet?' one of them asked.

" 'No,' some one replied, and I recognized the voice of Madame Lespard, an aged widow who occupied the flat above. 'You must wait, gentlemen, the law——'

" '*À bas* the law!' the man replied. 'Me, I have worked since five this morning, and I wish to go to bed.'

" 'But gentlemen, for the love of heaven, restrain yourselves!' Madame Lespard pleaded. '*La pauvre belle créature* may not be——'

" 'No fear,' the fellow interrupted. 'I can recognize them at a mile. Look here.' From somewhere he procured a lamp and brought it to the bed on which I lay. 'Observe the pupils of the eyes,' he ordered, 'see how they are fixed and motionless, even when I hold the light to them.' He brought the lamp within six inches of my face, flashing its rays directly into my eye; yet, though I felt its luminance, there was no sensation of being dazzled.

"Then suddenly the light went out. At first I thought he had extinguished the lamp, but in a moment I realized what had actually happened was that my eyelid had been lowered. Though I had not felt his finger on the lid, he had drawn it down across my eye as one might draw a curtain!

" 'And now observe again,' I heard him say, and the scratch of a match against a boot-sole was followed by the faint, unpleasant smell of searing flesh.

" 'Forbear, *Monsieur!*' old Madame Lespard cried in horror. 'Oh, you are callous—inhuman—you gentlemen of the *pompes funèbres!*'

"Then horrifying realization came to me. A vague, fantasmal thought which had been wafting in my brain, like an unremembered echo of a long-forgotten verse, suddenly crystallized in my mind. These men were from the *pompes funèbres*—the municipal undertakers of Paris—the heavy object they had lugged in was a coffin—*my coffin!* They thought me dead!

"I tried to rise, to tell them that I lived, to scream and beg them not to put me in that dreadful box. In vain. Although I struggled till it seemed my lungs and veins must burst with effort, I could not make a sound, could not stir a hand or finger, could not so much as raise the eyelid the undertaker's man had lowered!

" '*Ah, bon soir, Monsieur le Médicin!*' I heard the leader of the crew exclaim. 'We feared you might not come tonight, and the poor lady would have to lie uncoffined till tomorrow.'

"The fussy little municipal doctor bustled up to the bed on which I lay, flashed a lamp into my face and mumbled something about being overworked with *la grippe* killing so many people every day. Then he turned away and I heard the rustle of papers as he filled in the blanks of my certificate of death. If I could have controlled any member of my body I would have wept. As it was, I merely lay there, unable to shed a single tear for the poor unfortunate who was being hustled, living, to the grave.

"Konstantin's voice mingled with the others'. I heard him tell the doctor how I had fallen head-first down the stairs, how he had rushed wildly after me and borne me up to bed, only to find my neck was broken. The lying wretch actually sobbed as he told his perjured story, and the little doctor made perfunctory, clucking sounds of sympathy as he listened in-

attentively and wrote the death certificate —the warrant which condemned me to awful death by suffocation in the grave!

"I felt myself lifted from the bed and placed in the pine coffin, heard them lay the lid above me and felt the jar as they drove home nail after nail. At last the task was finished, the *entrepreneurs* accepted a drink of brandy and went away, leaving me alone with my murderer.

"I heard him take a turn across the room, heard the almost noiseless chuckle which he gave whenever he was greatly pleased, heard him scratch a match to light a cigarette; then, of a sudden, he checked his restless walk and turned toward the door with a short exclamation.

" 'Who comes?' he called as a measured tramping sounded in the passageway outside.

" 'The military police!' his hail was answered. 'Alexis Konstantin, we make you arrested for espionage. Come!'

"He snarled like a trapped beast. There was the *click* of a pistol-hammer, but the gendarmes were too quick for him. Like hounds upon the boar they leaped on him, and though he fought with savage fury—I had good cause to know how strong he was!—they overwhelmed him, beat him into submission with fists and saber-hilts and snapped steel bracelets on his wrists.

"All fight gone from him, cursing, whining, begging for mercy—to be allowed to spend the last night beside the body of his poor, dead wife!—they dragged him from the room and down the stairs. I never saw him again—until tonight!"

The girl smiled sadly, a trace of bitterness on her lips. "Have you ever lain awake at night in a perfectly dark room and tried to keep count of time?" she asked. "If you have, you know how long a minute can seem. Imagine how many centuries I lived through while I lay inside that coffin, sightless, motionless, soundless, but with my sense of hearing abnormally sharpened. For longer years than the vilest sinner must spend in purgatory I lay there thinking—thinking. The rattle of carts in the streets and a slight increase in temperature told me day had come, but the morning brought no hope to me. It meant only that I was that much nearer the Golgotha of my Via Dolorosa.

"At last they came. 'Where to?' a workman asked as rough hands took up my coffin and bore me down the stairs.

" 'Saint Sébastien,' the *premier ouvrier* returned, 'her husband made arrangements yesterday. They say he was rich. *Eh bien;* it is likely so; only the wealthy and the poor dare have funerals of the third class.'

"Over the cobbles of the streets the little, one-horse hearse jolted to the church, and at every revolution of the wheels my panic grew. 'Surely, *surely* I shall gain my self-control again,' I told myself. 'It can't be that I'll lie like this until——' I dared not finish out the sentence, even in my thoughts.

"The night before, the waiting had seemed endless. Now it seemed the shambling, half-starved nag which drew the hearse was winged like Pegasus and made the journey to the cemetery more swiftly than the fastest airplane.

"At last we halted, and they dragged me to the ground, rushed me at breakneck speed across the cemetery and put me down a moment while they did something to the coffin. What was it? Were they making ready to remove the lid? Had the municipal doctor remembered tardily how perfunctory his examination had been, and conscience-smitten, rushed to the cemetery to snatch me from the very jaws of the grave?

" 'We therefore commit her body to the earth—earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust——' the priest's low sing-

song came to me, muffled by the coffin-walls. Too late I realized the sound I heard had been only the knotted end of the lowering-rope falling on the coffin top as the workmen drew a loop about the case.

"The priest's chant became fainter and fainter. I felt myself sinking as though upon a slowly descending lift, while the ropes sawed and rasped against the square edges of the coffin, making noises like the bellow of a cracked bass viol, and the coffin teetered crazily from side to side and scraped against the raw edges of the grave. At last I came to rest. A jolt, a little thud, a final scraping noise, and the lowering-ropes were jerked free and drawn underneath the coffin and out of the grave. The end had come, there was no more——

"A terrible report, louder than the bursting of a shell, exploded just above my chest, and the close, confined air inside the coffin shook and trembled like the air in a dugout when hostile flyers lay down an air-barrage. A second shock burst above my face—its impact was so great I knew the coffin lid must surely crack beneath it—then a perfect drum-fire of explosions as clod on roaring clod struck down upon the thin pine which coffined me. My ears were paralyzed with the continuous detonations, I could feel the constantly increasing weight of earth pressing on my chest, my mouth, my nostrils. I made one final effort to rouse myself and scream for help; then a great flare, like the bursting of a star-shell, enveloped me and the last shred of sensation went amid a blaze of flame and roar of thunder.

"SLOWLY I fought back to consciousness. I shuddered as the memory of my awful dream came back to me. I'd dreamed that I was dead—or, rather, in a trance — that men from the *pompes funèbres* came and thrust me into a coffin and buried me in Saint Sébastien, and I had heard the clods fall on the coffin lid above me while I lay powerless to raise a hand.

"How good it was to lie there in my bed and realize that it had only been a dream! There, with the soft, warm mattress under me, I could lie comfortably and rest till time had somewhat softened the terror of that nightmare; then I would rise and make a cup of tea to soothe my frightened nerves; then go again to bed and peaceful sleep.

"But how dark it was! Never, even in those days of air-raids, when all lights were forbidden, had I seen a darkness so absolute, so unrelieved by any faintest ray of light. I moved my arms restlessly. To right and left were hard, rough wooden walls that pressed my sides and interfered with movement. I tried to rise, but fell back with a cry of pain, for I had struck my brow a violent blow. The air about me was very close and damp; heavy, as though confined under pressure.

"Suddenly I knew. Horror made my scalp sting and prickle and the awful truth ran through me like an icy wave. It was no dream, but dreadful fact. I had emerged from the coma which held me while preparations for my funeral were made; at last I was awake, mistress of my body, conscious and able to move and scream aloud for help—but none would ever hear me. I was coffined, shut up beneath a mound of earth in Saint Sébastien Cemetery—buried alive!

"I called aloud in agony of soul and body. The dreadful reverberation of my voice in that sealed coffin rang back against my ears like thunder-claps tossed back by mountain peaks.

"Then I went mad. Shrieking, cursing the day I was born and the God Who let this awful fate befall me, I writhed and twisted, kicked and struggled in the cof-

fin. The sides pressed in so closely that I could not raise my hands to my head, else I had torn my hair out by the roots and scratched my face to the bone, but I dug my nails into my thighs through the flimsy drapery of my shroud and bit my lips and tongue until my mouth was choked with blood and my raving cries were muted like the gurglings of a drowning man. Again and yet again I struck my brow against the thin pine wood, getting a fierce joy from the pain. I drew up my knees as far as they could go and arched my body in a bow, determined to burst the sepulcher which held me or spend my faint remaining spark of life in one last effort at escape. My forehead crashed against the coffin lid, a wave of nausea swept over me, and, faint and sick, I fell back to a merciful unconsciousness.

"The soft, warm sunlight of September streamed through an open window and lay upon the bed on which I lay, and from the table at my side a bowl of yellow roses sent forth a cloud of perfume. 'I'm surely dead,' I told myself. 'I'm released from the grave at last. I've died and gone—where? Where was I? If this were heaven or paradise, or even purgatory, it looked suspiciously like earth; yet how could I be living, and if I were truly dead, what business had I still on earth?

"Listlessly I turned my head. There, in American uniform, a captain's bars gleaming on his shoulders, stood Donald, my Donald, whom I'd thought lost to me forever. 'My dear,' I whispered, but got no farther, for in a moment his arms were round me and his lips were pressed to mine."

Sonia paused a moment, a smile of tenderest memory on her lips, the light that never was on sea or land within her eyes. "I didn't understand at all," she told us, "and even now I only know it second-hand. Perhaps Donald will tell you his part of the story. He knows the details better than I."

3. *La Morte Amoureuse*

THE leaping flames behind the andirons cast pretty highlights of red and orange on Donald Tanis and his wife as they sat hand in hand in the love seat beside the hearth rug. "I suppose you gentlemen think I was pretty precipitous in love-making, judging from the record Sonia's given," the young husband began with a boyish grin, "but you hadn't watched beside her bed while she hovered between sanity and madness as I had, and hadn't heard her call on me and say she loved me. Besides, when she looked at me that afternoon and said, 'My dear!' I knew she loved me just as well as though she'd taken all day long to tell me."

De Grandin and Renouard nodded joint and most emphatic approval. "And so you were married?" de Grandin asked.

"You bet we were," Donald answered. "There'd have been all sorts of red tape to cut if we'd been married as civilians, but I was in the army and Sonia wasn't a French citizeness; so we went to a friend of mine who was a padre in one of our outfits and had him tie the knot. But I'm telling this like a newspaper story, giving the ending first. To begin at the start:

"The sawbones in the hospital told me I was a medical freak, for the effect of the bursting 'coalbox' on me was more like the bends, or caisson disease, than the usual case of shell-shock. I didn't go dotty, nor get the horrors; I wasn't even deafened to any extent, but I did have the most God-awful neuralgic pains with a feeling of almost overwhelming giddiness whenever I tried to stand. I seemed as tall as the Woolworth tower the minute I got on my feet, and seven times out of ten I'd go sprawling on my face two sec-

onds after I got out of bed. They packed me off to a convalescent home at Biarritz and told me to forget I'd ever been mixed up in any such thing as a war.

"I did my best to follow orders, but one phase of the war just wouldn't be forgotten. That was the plucky girl who'd dragged me in that night the Fritzies tried to blow me into Kingdom Come. She'd been to see me in hospital before they sent me south, and I'd learned her name and unit, so as soon as I was up to it I wrote her. Lord, how happy I was when she answered!

"You know how those things are. Bit by bit stray phrases of intimacy crept into our notes, and we each got so that the other's letters were the most important things in life. Then Sonia's notes became less frequent and more formal; finally they hinted that she thought I was not interested any more. I did my best to disabuse her mind of *that* thought, but the letters came farther and farther apart. At last I decided I'd better tell her the whole truth, so I proposed by mail. I didn't like the idea, but there I was, way down in the Pyrénées, unable to get about, except in a wheel-chair, and there she was somewhere on the west front. I couldn't very well get to her to tell her of my love, and she couldn't come to me—and I was dreadfully afraid I'd lose her.

"Then the bottom dropped out of everything. I never got an answer to that letter. I didn't care a hang what happened to me then; just sat around and moped till the doctors began to think my brain must be affected, after all.

"I guess about the only thing that snapped me out of it was America's coming in. With my own country sending troops across, I had a definite object in life once more; to get into American uniform and have a last go at the Jerries. So I concentrated on getting well.

"It wasn't till the latter part of July, though, that they let me go, and then they wouldn't certify me for duty at the front. 'One more concussion and you'll go blotto altogether, lad,' the commandant told me before I left the nursing-home, and he must have put a flea in G. H. Q's. ear, too, for they turned me down cold as caviar when I asked for combatant service.

"I'd made a fair record with the Canadians, and had a couple of good friends in the War Department, so I drew a consolation prize in the form of a captaincy of infantry with assignment to liaison duty with the *Censure Militaire*.

"The French officers in the bureau were first-rate scouts and we got along famously. One day one of 'em told me of a queer case they'd had passed along by the British M. I. It seemed there was a queer sort of bird, a Russian by the name of Konstantin, who'd been making whoopee for some time, but covering up his tracks so skilfully they'd never been able to put salt on his tail. He'd been posing as an *émigré* and living in the Russian colony in Paris, always with plenty of money, but no visible employment. After the way the Bolshies had let the Allies down everything Russian was regarded with suspicion, and this bird had been a source of several sleepless nights for the French Intelligence. Finally, it seemed, they'd got deadwood on him.

"An elderly Russian who'd been billeted in the censor's bureau and always been above suspicion had been found dead in the streets one morning, a suicide, and the police had hardly got his body to the morgue when a letter from him came to the chief. In it he confessed that he'd been systematically stealing information from censored documents and turning it over to Konstantin, who was really an agent for the Soviets working with the Heinies. Incidentally, the old fellow named several other Russians who'd been

corrupted by Konstantin. It seemed his game was to lend them money when they were hard up, which they generally were, then get them to do a little innocuous spying for him in return for the loan. After that it was easy. He had only to threaten to denounce them in order to keep them in his power and make them go on gathering information for him, and of course the poor fish were more and more firmly entangled in the net with each job they did for him.

"Just why old Captain Malakoff chose to kill himself and denounce Konstantin wasn't clear, but the Frenchman figured that his conscience had been troubling him for some time and he'd finally gotten to the point where he couldn't live with it any longer.

"I'd been sitting back, not paying much attention to Lieutenant Fouchet's story, but when he mentioned the suicide's name my interest was roused. Of course, Malakoff isn't an unusual Russian name, but this man had been an officer in the Imperial army in his younger days, and had been taken in the French service practically as an act of charity. The details seemed to fit my case. 'I used to know a girl named Malakoff,' I said. 'Her father was in the censorship, too, I believe.'

"Fouchet smiled in that queer way he had, showing all his teeth at once beneath his little black mustache. I always suspected he was proud of the bridge work an American dentist had put in for him. 'Was the young lady's name Sonia, by any chance?' he asked.

"That brought me up standing. 'Yes,' I answered.

" 'Ah? It is doubtless the daughter of our estimable suicide, in that case,' he replied. 'Attend me: Two weeks ago she married with this Konstantin while she was on furlough from her unit at the front. Almost immediately after her marriage she rejoined her unit, and each day she has written her husband a letter detailing minutely the regiments and arms of service to which the wounded men she carried have belonged. These letters have, of course, been held for us by the British, and *voilà,* our case is complete. We are prepared to spring our trap. Captain Malakoff we buried with full military honors; no one suspects he has confessed. Tonight or tomorrow we all arrest this Konstantin and his accomplices.' He paused and smiled unpleasantly; then: 'It is dull work for the troops stationed here in Paris,' he added. 'They will appreciate a little target practise.'

" 'But—but what of Sonia—Madame Konstantin?' I asked.

" 'I think that we can let the lady go,' he said. 'Doubtless she was but a tool in her husband's hands; the same influence which drove her father from his loyalty may have been exerted on her; he is a very devil with the women, this Konstantin. Besides, several of his aides have confessed, so we have ample evidence on which to send him to the firing-party without the so pitiful little spy-letters his wife wrote to him. She must be dismissed from the service, of course, and never may she serve in any capacity, either with the civil or military governments, but at least she will be spared a court-martial and public disgrace. Am I not kind, my friend?'

"A FEW days later he came to me with a serious face. 'The man Konstantin has been arrested,' he said, 'but his wife, *hélas,* she is no more. The night before last she died in their apartment—fell down the stairs and broke her lovely neck, I'm told—and yesterday they buried her in Saint Sébastien. Courage, my friend!' he added as he saw my face. 'These incidents are most regrettable, but —there is much sorrow in the world today—*c'est la guerre.*'

"He looked at me a moment; then: 'You loved her?' he asked softly.

" 'Better than my life,' I answered. 'It was only the thought of her that brought me through—she dragged me in and saved my life one night out by Lens when the Jerries knocked me over with an air-bomb.'

" '*Mon pauvre garçon!*' he sympathized. Then: 'Consider me, my friend, there is a rumor—oh, a very unsubstantiated rumor, but still a rumor, that poor Madame Konstantin did not die an entirely natural death. An aged widow-neighbor of hers has related stories of a woman's cries for mercy, as though she were most brutally beaten, coming from the Konstantin apartment. One does not know this is a fact. The old talk much, and frequently without good reason, but——'

" 'The dog!' I interrupted. 'The cowardly dog, if he hit Sonia I'll——'

"Fouchet broke in. 'I shall attend the execution tomorrow,' he informed me. 'Would not you like to do the same?'

"Why I said yes I've no idea, but something, some force outside me, seemed to urge me to accept the invitation, and so it was arranged that I should go.

"A few hooded street lamps were battling ineffectually with the foggy darkness when we arrived at the Santé Prison a little after three next morning. Several motor cars were parked in the quadrangle and a sergeant assigned us seats in one of them. After what seemed an interminable wait, we saw a little knot of people come from one of the narrow doors leading into the courtyard—several officers in blue and black uniforms, a civilian handcuffed to two gendarmes, and a priest—and enter a car toward the head of the procession. In a moment we were under way, and I caught myself comparing our motorcade to a funeral procession on its way to the cemetery.

"A pale streak of dawn was showing in the east, bringing the gabled roofs and towers out in faint silhouette as we swung into the Place de la Nation. The military chauffeurs put on speed and we were soon in the Cours de Vincennes, the historic old fortification looming gloomy and forbidding against the sky as we dashed noiselessly on to the *champ d'execution*, where two companies of infantry in horizon blue were drawn up facing each other, leaving a narrow lane between. At the farther end of this aisle a stake of two-by-four had been driven into the turf, and behind and a little to the left stood a two-horse black-curtained van, from the rear of which could be seen protruding the butt of a deal coffin, rough and unfinished as a hardware merchant's packing-case. A trio of unshaven workmen in black smocks lounged beside the wagon, a fourth stood at the horses' heads.

"As our party alighted a double squad of musicians stationed at the lower end of the files of troops tossed their trumpets upward with a triple flourish and began sounding a salute and the soldiers came to present arms. I could see the tiny drops of misty rain shining like gouts of sweat on the steel helmets and bayonet blades as we advanced between the rows of infantry. A chill of dread ran up my spine as I glanced at the soldiers facing us on each side. Their faces were grave and stern, their eyes harder than the bayonets on their rifles. Cold, implacable hatred, pitiless as death's own self, was in every countenance. This was a spy, a secret enemy of France, who marched to his death between their perfectly alined ranks. The wet and chilly morning air seemed surcharged with an emanation of concentrated hate and ruthlessness.

"When the prisoner was almost at the stake he suddenly drew back against the handcuffs binding him to his guard and said something over his shoulder to the colonel marching directly behind him.

The officer first shook his head, then consulted with a major walking at his left, finally nooded shortly. '*Monsieur le Capitaine,*' a dapper little sub-lieutenant saluted me, 'the prisoner asks to speak with you. It is irregular, but the colonel has granted permission. However, you may talk with him only in the presence of a French officer'—he looked coldly at me, as though suspecting I were in some way implicated in the spy's plots—'you understand that, of course?'

" 'I have no wish to talk with him——' I began, but Fouchet interrupted.

" 'Do so, my friend,' he urged. 'Who knows, he may have news of Madame Sonia, your *morte amoureuse*. Come.

" 'I will act as witness to the conversation and stand surety for Captain Tanis,' he added to the subaltern with frigid courtesy.

"They exchanged polite salutes and decidedly impolite glares, and Fouchet and I advanced to where the prisoner and the priest stood between the guarding gendarmes.

"Even if I had known nothing of him —if I'd merely passed him casually on the boulevard—Konstantin would have repelled me. He was taller than the average and thin with a thinness that was something more than the sign of malnutrition; this skeletal gauntness seemed to have a distinct implication of evil. His hat had been removed, but from neck to feet he was arrayed in unrelieved black, a black shirt bound round the collar with a black cravat, a black serge suit of good cut and material, shoes of dull-black leather, even gloves of black kid on his long, thin hands. He had a sardonic face, long, smooth-shaven, its complexion an unhealthy yellowish olive. His eyes were black as carbon, and as lacking in luster, overhung by arched brows of intense, dead black, like his hair, which was parted in the middle and brushed sharply back from the temples, leaving a point at the center of the forehead. This inverted triangle led down to a long, hooked nose, and that to a long, sharp chin. Between the two there ran a wide mouth with thin, cruel lips of unnatural, brilliant red, looking, against the sallow face, as though they had been freshly rouged. An evil face it was, evil with a fathomless understanding of sin and passion, and pitiless as the visage of a predatory beast.

"He smiled briefly, almost imperceptibly, as I approached. 'Captain Donald Tanis, is it not?' he asked in a low, mocking voice.

"I bowed without replying.

" '*Monsieur le Capitaine,*' he proceeded, 'I have sent for you because I, of all the people in the world, can give you a word of comfort—and my time for disinterested philanthropy grows short. A little while ago I had the honor to take to wife a young lady in whom you had been deeply interested. Indeed, I think we might make bold to say you were in love with her, *nicht wahr?*'

"As I still returned no answer he opened that cavernous, red-lipped mouth of his and gave a low, almost soundless chuckle, repulsive as the grinning of a skull.

" '*Jawohl,*' he continued, 'let us waive the tender confession. Whatever your sentiments were toward her, there was no doubt of hers toward you. She married me, but it was you she loved. The marriage was her father's doing. He was in my debt, and I pressed him for my pound of flesh, only in this instance it was a hundred pounds or so of flesh — his daughter's. He'd acted as an agent of mine at the *Censure Militaire* until he'd worn out his usefulness, so I threatened to denounce him unless he would arrange a marriage for me with the charming Sonia. Having gotten what I wanted, I

had no further use for him. The sad-eyed old fool would have been a wet blanket on the ardor of my honeymoon. I told him to get out—gave him his choice between disposing of himself or facing a French firing-squad.

" 'It seems now that he chose to be revenged on me at the same time he gave himself the happy dispatch. Dear, dear, who would have thought the sniveling old dotard would have had the spirit?

" 'But we digress and the gentlemen grow impatient,' he nodded toward the file of troops. 'We Russians have a saying that the husband who fails to beat his wife is lacking in outward manifestation of affection.' He chuckled soundlessly again. 'I do not think my bride had cause for such complaint.

" 'What would you have given,' he asked in a low, mocking whisper, 'to have stood in my place that night three weeks ago? To have torn the clothing off her shuddering body, to have cooled her fevered blushes with your kisses, then melted her maidenly coolness with burning lips—to have strained her trembling form within your arms, then, in the moment of surrender, to have thrust her from you, beaten her down, hurled her to the floor and ground her underfoot till she crept suppliant to you on bare and bleeding knees, holding up her bruised and bleeding face to your blows or your caresses, as you chose to give them—utterly submissive, wholly, unconditionally yours, to do with as you wished?'

"He paused again and I could see little runnels of sweat trickling down his high, narrow brow as he shook with passion at the picture his words had evoked.

" '*Nu,*' he laughed shortly. 'I fear my love became too violent at last. The fish in the pan has no fear of strangling in the air. I can tell you this without fear of increasing my penalty. Sonia's death certificate declares she died of a broken neck resulting from a fall downstairs. Bah! She died because I beat her! I beat her to death, do you hear, my fish-blooded American, my chaste, chivalrous worshipper of women, and as she died beneath my blows, she called on you to come and save her!

" 'You thought she stopped her letters because she had grown tired? Bah, again. She did it out of pride, because she thought that you no longer cared. At my command her father intercepted the letters you sent to her Paris home—I read them all, even your halting, trembling proposal, which she never saw or even suspected. It was amusing, I assure you.

" 'You've come to see me die, *hein?* Then have your fill of seeing it. *I* saw Sonia die; heard her call for help to the lover who never came, saw her lower her pride to call out to the man she thought had jilted her as I rained blow on blow upon her!'

"Abruptly his manner changed, he was the suave and smooth-spoken gentleman once more. '*Auf Wiedersehen, Herr Hauptmann!*' he bid me with a mocking bow.

" 'I await your pleasure, *Messieurs,*' he announced, turning to the gendarmes.

"A DETAIL of twelve soldiers under the command of a lieutenant with a drawn sword detached itself from the nearer company of infantry, executed a left wheel and came to halt about five meters away, their rifles at the order, the bayonets removed. The colonel stepped forward and read a summary of the death sentence, and as we drew back the gendarmes unlatched their handcuffs and bound the prisoner with his back against the post with a length of new, white rope. A handkerchief was bound about his eyes and the gendarmes stepped back quickly.

" '*Garde à vous!*' the firing-party commander's voice rang out.

" '*Adieu pour ce monde, mon Lieutenant,* do not forget the *coup de grâce!*' Konstantin called airily.

"The lieutenant raised his sword and swung it downward quickly; a volley rang out from the platoon of riflemen.

"The transformation in the prisoner was instant and horrible. He collapsed, his body sagging weakly at the knees, as a filled sack collapses when its contents are let out through a cut, then sprawled full length face-downward on the ground, for the bullets had cut the rope restraining him. But on the turf the body writhed and contorted like a snake seared with fire, and from the widely opened mouth there came a spate of blood and gurgling, strangling cries mingled with half-articulate curses.

"A corporal stepped forward from the firing-party, his heavy automatic in his hand. He halted momentarily before the widening pool of blood about the writhing body, then bent over, thrust the muzzle of his weapon into the long black hair which, disordered by his death agonies, was falling about Konstantin's ears, and pulled the trigger. A dull report, like the popping of a champagne cork, sounded, and the twisting thing upon the ground gave one convulsive shudder, then lay still.

" 'This is the body of Alexis Konstantin, a spy, duly executed in pursuance of the sentence of death pronounced by the military court. Does any one lay claim to it?' announced the commandant in a steady voice. No answer came, though we waited what seemed like an hour to me.

" '*À vos rangs!*' Marching in quick time, the execution party filed past the prostrate body on the blood-stained turf and rejoined its company, and at a second command, the two units of infantry formed columns of fours and marched from the field, the trumpet sounding at their head.

"The black-smocked men dragged the coffin from the black-curtained van, dumped the mangled body unceremoniously into it, and the driver whipped his horses into a trot toward the cemetery of Vincennes where executed spies and traitors were interred in unmarked graves.

" 'A queer one, that,' an officer of the party which had accompanied the prisoner to execution told us as we walked toward our waiting cars. 'When we left the Santé he was almost numb with fright, but when I told him that the *coup de grâce*—the mercy shot—was always given on occasions of this kind, he seemed to forget his fears and laughed and joked with us and with his warders till the very minute when we reached the field. *Tiens,* he seemed to have a premonition that the volley would not at once prove fatal and that he must suffer till the mercy shot was given. Do you recall how he reminded the platoon commander to remember the shot before the order to fire was given? Poor devil!' ".

"*Ah?*" said Jules de Grandin. "*A-ah?* Do you report that conversation accurately, my friend?"

"Of course I do," young Tanis answered. "It's stamped as firmly on my mind as if it happened yesterday. One doesn't forget such things, sir."

"*Précisément, Monsieur,*" de Grandin agreed with a thoughtful nod. "I did but ask for verification. This may have some bearing on that which may develop later, though I hope not. What next, if you please?"

Young Tanis shook his head as though to clear an unhappy memory from his mind. "Just one thought kept dinning in my brain," he continued. " 'Sonia is dead —Sonia is dead!' a jeering voice seemed repeating endlessly in my ear. 'She called on you for help and you failed her!' By the time we arrived at the censor's bureau I was half mad; by luncheon I had formed

a resolve. I would visit Saint Sébastien that night and take farewell of my dead sweetheart—she whom Fouchet had called my *morte amoureuse*.

"The light mist of the morning had ripened into a steady, streaming downpour by dark; by half-past eleven, when my fiacre let me down at Saint Sébastien, the wind was blowing half a gale and the rain drops stung like whip-lashes as they beat into my face beneath the brim of my field hat. I turned my raincoat collar up as far as it would go and splashed and waded through the puddles to the pentice of the tiny chapel beside the cemetery entrance. A light burned feebly in the intendant's cabin, and as the old fellow came shuffling to open the door in answer to my furious knocks, a cloud of superheated, almost fetid air burst into my face. There must have been a one per cent concentration of carbon monoxid in the room, for every opening was tightly plugged and a charcoal brazier was going full blast.

"He blinked stupidly at me a moment; then: '*M'sieur l'Americain?*' he asked doubtfully, looking at my soaking hat and slicker for confirmation of his guess. '*M'sieur* has no doubt lost his way, *n'est-ce-pas?* This is the cemetery of Saint Sébastien——'

" '*Monsieur l'Americain* has not lost his way, and he is perfectly aware this is the cemetery of Saint Sébastien,' I assured him. Without waiting for the invitation I knew he would not give, I pushed by him into the stuffy little cabin and kicked the door shut. 'Would the estimable *fossoyeur* care to earn a considerable sum of money—five hundred—a thousand francs—perhaps?' I asked.

" '*Sacré Dieu*, he is crazy, this one,' the old man muttered. 'Mad he is, like all the Yankees, and drunk in the bargain. Help me, blessed Mother!'

"I took him by the elbow, for he was edging slowly toward the door, and shook a bundle of hundred-franc notes before his staring eyes. 'Five of these now, five more when you have fulfilled your mission, and not a word to any one!' I promised.

"His little shoe-button eyes shone with speculative avarice. '*M'sieur* desires that I help him kill some one?' he ventured. 'Is it perhaps that *M'sieur* has outside the body of one whom he would have secretly interred?'

" 'Nothing as bad as that,' I answered, laughing in spite of myself, then stated my desires baldly. 'Will you do it, at once?' I finished.

" 'For fifteen hundred francs, perhaps——' he began, but I shut him off.

" 'A thousand or nothing,' I told him.

" '*Mille tonnerres, M'sieur*, you have no heart,' he assured me. 'A poor man can scarcely live these days, and the risk I run is great. However,' he added hastily as I folded the bills and prepared to thrust them back into my pocket, 'however, one consents. There is nothing else to do.' He slouched off to a corner of the hut and picked up a rusty spade and mattock. 'Come, let us go,' he growled, dropping a folded burlap sack across his shoulders.

"The rain, wind-driven between the leafless branches of the poplar trees, beat dismally down upon the age-stained marble tombs and the rough, unsodded mounds of the ten-year concessions. Huddled by the farther wall of the cemetery, beneath their rows of ghastly white wooden signboards, the five- and three-year concessions seemed to cower from the storm. These were the graves of the poorer dead, one step above the tenants of the Potter's Field. The rich, who owned their tombs or graves in perpetuity, slept their last long sleep undisturbed; next came the rows of ten-year concessionaires, whose relatives had bought them

the right to lie in moderately deep graves for a decade, after which their bones would be exhumed and deposited in a common charnel-house, all trace of their identity lost. The five-year concessionnaires' graves were scarcely deeper than the height of the coffins they enclosed, and their repose was limited to half a decade, while the three-year concessions, placed nearest the cemetery wall, were little more than mounds of sodden earth heaped over coffins sunk scarce a foot underground, destined to be broken down and emptied in thirty-six months. The sexton led the way to one of these and began shoveling off the earth with his spade.

"His tool struck an obstruction with a thud and in a moment he was wrenching at the coffin top with the flat end of his mattock.

"I took the candle-lantern he had brought and flashed its feeble light into the coffin. Sonia lay before me, rigid as though petrified, her hands tight-clenched, the nails digging into the soft flesh of her palms, little streams of dried blood running from each self-inflicted wound. Her eyes were closed—thank heaven!—her mouth a little open, and on her lips there lay a double line of bloody froth.

" '*Grand Dieu!*' the sexton cried as he looked past me into the violated coffin. 'Come away, quickly, *M'sieur;* it is a vampire that we see! Behold the life-like countenance, the opened mouth all bloody from the devil's breakfast, the hands all wet with human blood! Come, I will strike it to the heart with my pickax and sever its unhallowed head with my spade, then we shall fill the grave again and go away all quickly. *O, Sainte Vierge,* have pity on us! See, *M'sieur,* I do begin!' He laid the spur-end of his mattock against Sonia's left breast, and I could see the flimsy crêpe night robe she wore by way of shroud and the soft flesh beneath dimple under the iron's weight.

" 'Stop it, you fool!' I bellowed, snatching his pickax and bending forward. 'You shan't——' Some impulse prompted me to rearrange the shroud where the muddy mattock had soiled it, and as my hand came into contact with the beloved body I started. *The flesh was warm.*

"I thrust the doddering old sexton back with a tremendous shove and he landed sitting in a pool of mud and water and squatted there, mouthing bleating admonitions to me to come away.

"Sinking to my knees beside the grave I put my hand against her breast, then laid a finger on her throat beneath the angle of the jaw, as they'd taught us in first-aid class. There was no doubt of it. Faint as the fluttering of a fledgling thrust prematurely from its nest and almost perished with exposure, but still perceptible, a feeble pulse was beating in her breast and throat.

"A moment later I had snatched my raincoat off, wrapped it about her, and, flinging a handful of banknotes at the screaming sexton, I clasped her flaccid body in my arms, sloshed through the mud to the cemetery wall and vaulted over it.

"I found myself in a sort of alley flanked on both sides by stables, a pale light burning at its farther end. Toward this I made, bending almost double against the driving rain in order to shield my precious burden from the storm and to present the poorest target possible if the sexton should procure a gun and take a pot-shot at me.

"It seemed as though I waded through the rain for hours, though actually I don't suppose I walked for more than twenty minutes before a prowling taxi hailed me. I jumped into the vehicle and told the man to drive to my quarters as fast as his old rattletrap would go, and while we

skidded through the sodden streets I propped Sonia up against the cushions and wrapped my blouse about her feet while I held her hands in mine, chafing them and breathing on them.

"ONCE in my room I put her into bed, piled all the covers I could about her, heated water and soaked some flannel cloths in it and put the hot rolls to her feet, then mixed some cognac and water and forced several spoonfuls of it down her throat.

"I must have worked an hour, but finally my clumsy treatment began to show results. The faintest flush appeared in her cheeks, and a tinge of color came to the pale, wounded lips which I'd wiped clean of blood and bathed in water and cologne when I first put her into bed.

"As soon as I dared leave her for a moment I hustled out and roused the *concierge* and sent her scrambling for a doctor. It seemed a week before he came, and when he did he merely wrote me a prescription, looked importantly through his *pince-nez* and suggested that I have him call next morning.

"I pleaded illness at the bureau and went home from the surgeon's office with advice to stay indoors as much as possible for the next week. I was a sort of privileged character, you see, and got away with shameless malingering which would have gotten any other fellow a good, sound roasting from the sawbones. Every moment after that which I could steal from my light duties at the bureau I spent with Sonia. Old Madame Couchin, the *concierge,* I drafted into service as a nurse, and she accepted the situation with the typical Frenchwoman's aplomb.

"It was September before Sonia finally came back to full consciousness, and then she was so weak that the month was nearly gone before she could totter out with me to get a little sunshine and fresh air in the *bois.* We had a wonderful time shopping at the Galleries Lafayette, replacing the horrifying garments Madame Couchin had bought for us with a suitable wardrobe. Sonia took rooms at a little *pension,* and in October we were——"

"*Ha, parbleu,* married at last!" Jules de Grandin exclaimed with a delighted chuckle. "*Mille crapauds,* my friend, I thought we never should have got you to the parson's door!"

"Yes, and so we were married," Tanis agreed with a smile.

The girl lifted her husband's hand and cuddled it against her cheek. "Please, Donald dear," she pleaded, "please don't let Konstantin take me from you again."

"But, darling," the young man protested, "I tell you, you must be mistaken.

"Mustn't she, Doctor de Grandin?" he appealed. "If I saw Konstantin fall before a firing-party and saw the corporal blow his brains out, and saw them nail him in his coffin, he *must* be dead, mustn't he? Tell her she can't be right, sir!"

"But, Donald, you saw *me* in *my* coffin, too——" the girl began.

"My friends," de Grandin interrupted gravely, "it may be that you both are right, though the good God forbid that it is so."

4. *Menace Out of Bedlam*

DONALD and Sonia Tanis regarded him with open-mouthed astonishment. "You mean it's possible Konstantin might have escaped in some mysterious way, and actually come here?" the young man asked at last.

The little Frenchman made no answer, but the grave regard he bent on them seemed more ominous than any vocally expressed opinion.

"But I say," Tanis burst out, as though stung to words by de Grandin's silence, "he can't take her from me. I can't say

I know much about such things, but surely the law won't let——"

"*Ah bah!*" Inspector Renouard's sardonic laugh cut him short. "The law," he gibed, "what is it? *Parfum d'un chameau.* I think in this country it is a code devised to give the criminal license to make the long nose at honest men. Yes.

"A month and more ago I came to this so splendid country in search of one who has most richly deserved the kiss of Madame Guillotine, and here I catch him red-handed in most flagrant crime. 'You are arrest,' I tell him. 'For wilful murder, for sedition and subornation of sedition and for stirring up rebellion against the Republic of France I make you arrested.' *Voilà.*

"I take him to the Ministry of Justice. '*Messieurs,*' I say, 'I have here a very noted criminal whom I desire to return to French jurisdiction that he may suffer according to his misdoings.' Certainly.

"*Alors,* what happens? The gentlemen at the *Palais de Justice* tell me: 'It shall be even as you say.'

"Do they assist me? *Hélas,* entirely otherwise. In furtherance of his diabolical designs this one has here abducted a young American lady and on her has committed the most abominable assault. For this, say the American authorities, he must suffer.

" 'How much?' I ask. 'Will his punishment be death?'

" 'Oh, no,' they answer me. 'We shall incarcerate him in the bastille for ten years; perhaps fifteen.'

" '*Bien alors,*' I tell them, 'let us compose our differences amicably. Me, I have traced this despicable one clear across the world, I have made him arrested for his crimes; I am prepared to take him where a most efficient executioner will decapitate his head with all celerity. *Voilà tout;* a man dies but once, let this one die for the crime which is a capital offense by the laws of France, and which is not, but should be capital by American law. That way we shall both be vindicated.' Is not my logic absolute? Would not a three-year-old child of most deficient intellect be convinced by it? Of course; but these ones? *Non.*

" 'We sympathize with you,' they tell me, 'but *tout la même* he stays with us to expiate his crime in prison.' Then they begin his prosecution.

"*Grand Dieu,* the farce that trial is! First come the lawyers with their endless tongues and heavy words to make fools of the jury. Next comes a corps of doctors who will testify to anything, so long as they are paid. 'Not guilty by reason of insanity,' the verdict is, and so they take him to a madhouse.

"Not only that," he added, his grievance suddenly becoming vocal again, "they tell me that should this despicable one recover from his madness, he will be discharged from custody and may successfully resist extradition by the Government of France. Renouard is made the fool of! If he could but once get his hands on this criminal, Sun Ah Poy, or if that half-brother of Satan would but manage to escape from the madhouse that I might find him unprotected by the attendants——"

Crash! I ducked my head involuntarily as a missile whistled through the sleet-drenched night, struck the study window a shattering blow and hurtled across the room, smashing against the farther wall with a resounding crack.

Renouard, the Tanises and I leaped to our feet as the egg-like object burst and a sickly-sweet smell permeated the atmosphere, but Jules de Grandin seemed suddenly to go wild. As though propelled by a powerful spring he bounded from the couch, cleared the six feet or so

separating him from Sonia in a single flying leap and snatched at the trailing drapery of her dinner frock, ripping a length of silk off with a furious tug and flinging it veilwise about her head. "Out —for your lives, go out!" he cried, covering his mouth and nose with a wadded handkerchief and pushing the girl before him toward the door.

We obeyed instinctively, and though a scant ten seconds intervened between the entry of the missile and our exit, I was already feeling a stinging sensation in my eyes and a constriction in my throat as though a ligature had been drawn around it. Tears were streaming from Renouard's and Tanis' eyes, too, as we rushed pellmell into the hall and de Grandin slammed the door behind us. "What——" I began, but he waved me back.

"Papers—newspapers—all you have!" he ordered hysterically, snatching a rug from the hall floor and stuffing it against the crack between the door and sill.

I took a copy of the *Evening News* from the hall table and handed it to him, and he fell to tearing it in strips and stuffing the cracks about the door with fierce energy. "To the rear door," he ordered. "Open it and breath as deeply as you may. I do not think we were exposed enough to do us permanent injury, but fresh air will help, in any event.

"I humbly beg your pardon, Madame Tanis," he added as he joined us in the kitchen a moment later. "It was most unconventional to set on you and tear your gown to shreds the way I did, but" —he turned to Tanis with a questioning smile—"perhaps *Monsieur* your husband can tell you what it was we smelled in the study a moment hence."

"I'll tell the world I can," young Donald answered. "I smelt that stuff at Mons, and it darn near put me in my grave. You saved us; no doubt about it, Doctor de Grandin. It's tricky, that stuff."

"*What* is?" I asked. This understanding talk of theirs got on my nerves.

"Name of a thousand pestiferous mosquitoes, yes, what was it?" Renouard put in.

"Phosgene gas—$COCl_2$," de Grandin answered. "It was among the earliest of gases used in the late war, and therefore not so deadly as the others; but it is not a healthy thing to be inhaled, my friend. However, I think that in a little while the study will be safe, for that broken window makes a most efficient ventilator, and the phosgene is quickly dissipated in the air. Had he used mustard gas—*tiens*, one does not like to speculate on such unpleasant things. No."

"He?" I echoed. "Who the dickens are you talking——"

There was something grim in the smile which hovered beneath the upturned ends of his tightly waxed wheat-blond mustache. "I damn think Friend Renouard has his wish," he answered, and a light which heralded the joy of combat shone in his small blue eyes. "If Sun Ah Poy has not burst from his madhouse and come to tell us that the game of hide-and-go-seek is on once more I am much more mistaken than I think. Yes. Certainly."

The whining, warning *whe-e-eng!* of a police car's siren sounded in the street outside and heavy feet tramped my front veranda while heavy fists beat furiously on the door.

"Ouch, God be praised, ye're all right, Doctor de Grandin, sor!" Detective Sergeant Jeremiah Costello burst into the house, his greatcoat collar turned up round his ears, a shining film of sleet encasing the black derby hat he wore habitually. "We came here hell-bent for election to warn ye, sor," he added breath-

lessly. "We just heard it ourselves, an'——"

"*Tiens,* so did we!" de Grandin interrupted with a chuckle.

"Huh? What're ye talkin' of, sor? I've come to warn ye——"

"That the efficiently resourceful Doctor Sun Ah Poy, of Cambodia and elsewhere, has burst the bonds of bedlam and taken to the warpath, *n'est-ce-pas?*" de Grandin laughed outright at the Irishman's amazed expression.

"Come, my friend," he added, "there is no magic here. I did not gaze into a crystal and go into a trance, then say, 'I see it all—Sun Ah Poy has escaped from the asylum for the criminal insane and comes to this place to work us mischief.' Indeed no. Entirely otherwise. Some fifteen minutes gone the good Renouard expressed a wish that Doctor Sun might manage his escape so that the two might come to grips once more, and hardly had the words flown from his lips when a phosgene bomb was merrily tossed through the window, and it was only by a hasty exit we escaped the inconvenience of asphyxiation. I am not popular with many people, and there are those who would shed few tears at my funeral, but I do not know of one who would take pleasure in throwing a stink-bomb through the window to stifle me. No, such clever tricks as that belong to Doctor Sun, who loves me not at all, but who dislikes my friend Renouard even more cordially. *Alors,* I deduce that Sun Ah Poy is out again and we shall have amusement for some time to come. Am I correct?"

"Check an' double check, as th' felly says," Costello nodded. " 'Twas just past dark this evenin' whilst th' warders wuz goin' through th' State Asylum, seein' everything wuz shipshape for th' night, sor, that Doctor Sun did his disappearin' act. He'd been meek as anny lamb ever since they took him to th' bughouse, an' th' orderlies down there had decided he warn't such a bad actor, afther all. Well, sor, th' turnkey passed his door, an' this Doctor Sun invites him in to see a drawin' he's made. He's a clever felly wid his hands, for all his bein' crippled, an' th' boys at th' asylum is always glad to see what he's been up to makin'.

"Th' pore chap didn't have no more chance than a sparry in th' cat's mouth, sor. Somewhere th' Chinese divil had got hold of a table-knife an' ground it to a razor edge. One swipe o' that across th' turnkey's throat an' he's floppin' round th' floor like a chicken wid its head cut off, not able to make no outcry for th' blood that's stranglin' him. A pore nut 'cross th' corridor lets out a squawk, an' Doctor Sun ups an' cuts *his* throat as cool as ye'd pare a apple for yer luncheon, sor. They finds this out from another inmate that's seen it all but had sense enough in his pore crazy head to keep his mouth shut till afther it's all over.

"Ye know th' cell doors ain't locked, but th' diff'rent wards is barred off from each other wid corridors between. This Doctor Sun takes th' warder's uniform cap as calm as ye please and claps it on his ugly head, then walks to th' ward door an' unlocks it wid th' keys he's taken from th' turnkey. Th' guard on duty in th' corridor don't notice nothin' till Sun's clear through th' door; then it's too late, for Sun stabs 'im to th' heart before he can so much as raise his club, an' beats it down th' corridor. There's a fire escape at th' other end o' th' passage—one o' them spiral things that works like a slide inside a sheet-iron cylinder, ye know. It's locked, but Sun has th' key, an' in a moment he's slipped inside, locked th' door behind him an' slid down faster than a snake on roller skates. He's into

th' grounds an' over th' wall before they even know he's loose, an' he must o' had confederates waitin' for him outside, for they heard th' roar of the car runnin' like th' hammers o' hell whilst they're still soundin' th' alarm.

"O' course th' State Troopers an' th' local police wuz notified, but he seems to 'a' got clean away, except——"

"Yes, except?" de Grandin prompted breathlessly, his little, round blue eyes sparkling with excitement.

"Well, sor, we don't rightly *know* it wuz him, but we're suspectin' it. They found a trooper run down an' kilt on th' highway over by Morristown, wid his motorcycle bent up like a pretzel an' not a whole bone left in his body. Looks like Sun's worrk, don't it, sor?"

"Assuredly," the Frenchman nodded. "Is there more to tell?"

"Nothin' except he's gone, evaporated, vanished into thin air, as th' sayin' is, sor; but we figured he's still nursin' a grudge agin Inspector Renouard an' you, an' maybe come to settle it, so we come fast as we could to warn ye."

"Your figuring is accurate, my friend," de Grandin answered with another smile. "May we trespass on your good nature to ask that you escort Monsieur and Madame Tanis home? I should not like them to encounter Doctor Sun Ah Poy, for he plays roughly. As for us—Renouard, Friend Trowbridge and me—we shall do very well unguarded for tonight. Good Doctor Sun has shot his bolt; he will not be up to other tricks for a little time, I think, for he undoubtlessly has a hide-away prepared, and to it he has gone. He would not linger here, knowing the entire *gendarmerie* is on his heels. No. To hit and run, and run as quickly as he hits, will be his policy, for a time, at least."

5. *Desecration*

"DOCTOR DE GRANDIN—gentlemen!" Donald Tanis burst into the breakfast room as de Grandin, Renouard and I were completing our morning meal next day. "Sonia—my wife—she's gone!"

"Eh? What is it you tell me?" de Grandin asked. "Gone?"

"Yes, sir. She rides every morning, you see, and today she left for a canter in the park at six o'clock, as usual. I didn't feel up to going out this morning, and lay abed rather late. I was just going down to breakfast when they told me her horse had come back to the stable—alone."

"Oh, perhaps she had a tumble in the park," I suggested soothingly. "Have you looked——"

"I've looked everywhere," he broke in. "Soldiers' Park's not very large, and if she'd been in it I'd have found her long ago. After what happened last night, I'm afraid——"

"*Morbleu, mon pauvre,* you fear with reason," de Grandin cut him short. "Come, let us go. We must seek her—we must find her, right away, at once; without delay, for——"

"If ye plaze, sor, Sergeant Costello's askin' for Doctor de Grandin," announced Nora McGinnis, appearing at the breakfast room door. "He's got a furrin gentleman wid him," she amplified as de Grandin gave an exclamation of impatience at the interruption, "an' says as how he's most partic'lar to talk wid ye a minit."

Father Pophosepholos, shepherd of the little flock of Greeks, Lithuanians and Russians composing the congregation of St. Basil's Church, paused at the doorway beside the big Irish policeman with uplifted hand as he invoked divine blessing on the inmates of the room, then advanced with smiling countenance to take the slim white fingers de Grandin ex-

tended. The aged *papa* and the little Frenchman were firmest friends, though one lived in a thought-world of the Middle-Ages, while the other's thoughts were modern as the latest model airplane.

"My son," the old man greeted, "the powers of evil were abroad last night. The greatest treasure in the world was ravished from my keeping, and I come to you for help."

"A treasure, *mon père?*" de Grandin asked.

Father Pophosepholos rose from his chair, and we forgot the cheap, worn stuff of his purple cassock, his broken shoes, even the pinchbeck gold and imitation amethyst of his pectoral cross as he stood in patriarchal majesty with upraised hands and back-thrown head. "The most precious body and blood of our blessed Lord," he answered sonorously. "Last night, between the sunset and the dawn, they broke into the church and bore away the holy Eucharist." For a moment he paused, then in all reverence echoed the Magdalen's despairing cry: "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him!"

"*Ha,* do you say it?" The momentary annoyance de Grandin had evinced at the old priest's intrusion vanished as he gazed at the cleric with a level stare of fierce intensity. "Tell me of the sacrilege. All—tell me all. Right away; at once, immediately. I am all attention!"

Father Pophosepholos resumed his seat and the sudden fire which animated him died down. Once more he was a tired old man, the threadbare shepherd of a half-starved flock. "I saw you smile when I mentioned a treasure being stolen from *me,*" he told de Grandin gently. "You were justified, my son, for St. Basil's is a poor church, and I am poorer still. Only the faith which is in me sustains me through the struggle. We ask no help from the public, and receive none; the rich Latins look on us with pity, the Anglicans sometimes give us slight assistance; the Protestant heretics scarcely know that we exist. We are a joke to them, and, because we're poor, they sometimes play mischievous pranks on us—their boys stone our windows, and once or twice when parties of their young people have come slumming they have disturbed our services with their thoughtless laughter or ill-bred talking during service. Our liturgy is only meaningless mummery to them, you see.

"But this was no childish mischief, not even the vandalism of irreverent young hoodlums!" his face flushed above its frame of gray beard. "This was deliberately planned and maliciously executed blasphemy and sacrilege!

"Our rubric makes no provision for low mass, like the Latins'," he explained, "and daily celebration of the Eucharist is not enjoined; so, since our ceremony of consecration is a lengthy one, we customarily celebrate only once or twice a week, and the presanctified elements are reserved in a tabernacle on the altar.

"This morning as I entered the sanctuary I found everything in disorder. The veils had been torn from the table, thrown upon the floor and fouled with filth, the ikon of the Virgin had been ripped from the reredos and the tabernacle violated. They had carried off the elements together with the chalice and paten, and in their place had thrust into the tabernacle the putrefying carcass of a cat!" Tears welled in the old man's eyes as he told of the sacrilege.

Costello's face went brick-red with an angry flush, for the insult put upon the consecrated elements stung every fiber of his nature. "Bad cess to 'em!" he muttered. "May they have th' curse o' Cromwell!"

"They took my chasuble and cope, my alb, my miter and my stole," the priest continued, "and from the sacristy they took the deacon's vestments——"

"*Grand Dieu,* I damn perceive their game!" the little Frenchman almost shouted. "At first I thought this might be but an act of wantonness performed by wicked boys. I have seen such things. Also, the chalice and the paten might have some little value to a thief; but this is no mere case of thievery mixed with sacrilege. *Non.* The stealing of the vestments is conclusive proof.

"Tell me, *mon père,*" he interrupted himself with seeming irrelevance, "it is true, is it not, that only the celebrant and the deacon are necessary for the office of consecration? No subdeacon is required?"

The old priest nodded wonderingly.

"And these elements were already consecrated?"

"They were already consecrated," the clergyman returned. "Presanctified, we call it when they are reserved for future services."

"Thank God, no little one then stands in peril," de Grandin answered.

"*Mon père,* it gives me greatest joy to say I'll aid in tracking down these miscreants. Monsieur Tanis, unless I am more greatly mistaken than I think, there is direct connection between your lady's disappearance and this act of sacrilege. Yes, I am sure of it!" He nodded several times with increasing vigor.

"But, my dear fellow," I expostulated, "what possible connection can there be between——"

"*Chut!*" he cut me short. "This is the doing of that villain Konstantin! Assuredly. The wife he has again abducted, though he has not attempted to go near the husband. For why? *Pardieu,* because by leaving Monsieur Donald free he still permits the wife one little, tiny ray of hope. With vilest subtlety he holds her back from the black brink of despair and suicide that he may force her to compliance to his will by threats against the man she loves. *Sacré nom d'un artichaut,* I shall say yes! Certainly; of course."

"You—you mean he'll make Sonia go with him—leave me—by threats against my life?" young Tanis faltered.

"*Précisément.* That and more, I fear, Monsieur," de Grandin answered somberly.

"But what worse can he do than that? You—you don't think he'll kill her, do you?" the husband cried.

The little Frenchman rose and paced the study a moment in thoughtful silence. At last: "Courage, *mon brave,*" he bade, putting a kindly hand on Tanis' shoulder. "You and Madame Sonia have faced perils—even the perils of the grave—before. Take heart! I shall not hide from you that your present case is as desperate as any you have faced before; but if my guess is right, as heaven knows I hope it is not, your lady stands in no immediate bodily peril. If that were all we had to fear we might afford to rest more easily; as it is——"

"As it is," Renouard cut in, "let us go with all celerity to St. Basil's church and look to see what we can find. The trail grows cold, *mon* Jules, but——"

"But we shall find and follow it," de Grandin interrupted. "*Parbleu,* we'll follow it though it may lead to the fire-doors of hell's own furnaces, and then——"

The sharp, insistent ringing of the telephone broke through his fervid prophecy.

"This is Miss Wilkinson, supervisor at Casualty Hospital, Doctor Trowbridge," a professionally precise feminine voice informed me. "If Detective Sergeant Costello is at your office, we've a message for him. Officer Hornsby is here, about to go on the table, and insists we put a message

through to Sergeant Costello at once. We've already called him at headquarters, and they told us——"

"Just a minute," I bade. "It's for you, Sergeant," I told Costello, handing him the instrument.

"Yes," Costello called into the mouthpiece. "Yes; uh-huh. *What?* Glory be to God!"

He swung on us with flushing face and blazing eyes. " 'Twas Hornsby," he announced. "He wuz doin' relief traffic duty out at Auburndale an' Gloucester Streets, an' a car run 'im down half an hour ago. There wuz no witnesses to th' accident, an' Hornsby couldn't git th' license number, but just before they struck 'im he seen a felly ridin' in th' car.

"You'll be rememberin' Hornsby wuz in th' raidin' party that captured this here Doctor Sun?" he asked de Grandin.

The Frenchman nodded.

"Well, sor, Hornsby's got th' camera eye. He don't forget a face once he's seen it, even for a second, an' he tells me Doctor Sun wuz ridin' in th' car that bowled 'im over. They run 'im down deliberate, sor, an' Sun Ah Poy was ridin' wid a long, tall, black-faced felly wid slantin' eyebrows an' a pan like th' pictures ye see o' Satan in th' chur-rches, sor!"

"And what was this one doing with his pan?" Renouard demanded. "Is it that——"

"Pan," Costello shouted, raising his voice as many people do when seeking to make clear their meaning to a foreigner, " 'twas his pan I'm speaking of. Not *a* pan; *his* pan—his mush—his map—his puss, ye know."

"Pas possible! The miscreant held a pan of mush for his cat to eat, and a map, also, while his motor car ran down the gendarme?"

"Oh, go sit in a tree—*no!"* Costello roared. "It's his face I'm afther tellin' ye of. Hornsby said he had a face—a face, git me; a face is a pan an' a pan's a face—like th' divil's, an' he wuz ridin' in th' same car wid this here now Doctor Sun Ah Poy that's made his getaway from th' asylum! Savvy?"

"Oh, mais oui," the Frenchman grinned. "I apprehend. It is another of the so droll American idioms which you employ. *Oui-da;* I perceive him."

" 'Tis plain as anny pikestaff they meant to do 'im in deliberately," Costello went on, "an' they like to made good, too. Th' pore felly's collarbone is broke, an' so is several ribs; but glory be to heaven, they wuz goin' so fast they bumped 'im clean out o' th' road an' onto th' sidewalk, an' they kep' on goin' like th' hammers o' hell widout waitin' to see how much they'd hurt 'im."

"You hear, my friends?" de Grandin cried, leaping to his feet, eyes flashing, diminutive, wheat-blond mustache twitching with excitement like the whiskers of an angry tom-cat. "You heard the message of this gloriously devoted officer of the law who sends intelligence to Costello even as he waits to go upon the operating-table? What does it mean? I ask. No, I demand what does it mean?

"Sun Ah Poy rides in a car which maims and injures the police, and with him rides another with a face like Satan's. *Mordieu, mes amis,* we shall have hunting worthy of our utmost skill, I think.

"Sun Ah Poy and Konstantin have met and combined against us! Come, my friends, let us take their challenge.

"Come, Renouard, my old one, this *is* more than mere police work. The enemy laughs at our face, he makes the thumb-nose at us and at all for which we stand. Forward to the battle, *brave comrade. Pour la France!"*

6. *Allies Unawares*

FOUR of us—de Grandin, Renouard, Donald Tanis and I—sat before my study fire and stared gloomily into the flames. All day the other three, accompanied by Costello, had combed the city and environs, but neither sign nor clue, trail nor trace of the missing woman could they find.

"By heaven," Tanis cried, striking his forehead with his hand in impotent fury, "it looks as if the fellow were the devil himself!"

"Not so bad a guess, *mon brave,*" de Grandin nodded gloomily. "Certain it is he is on friendly terms with the dark powers, and, as usual, Satan is most kindly to his own."

"*Ah bah, mon Jules,*" Renouard rejoined, "you do but make a bad matter so much worse with your mumblings of Satan and his cohorts. Is it not sufficient that two poor ladies of this town are placed in deadly peril without your prating of diabolical opponents and——"

"*Two* ladies?" Tanis interrupted wonderingly. "Why, has he abducted some one else——"

"*Bien non,*" Renouard's quick explanation came. "It is of another that I speak, *Monsieur.* This Konstantin, who has in some way met with Sun Ah Poy and made a treaty of alliance with him, has taken your poor lady for revenge, even as he sought to do when first we met him, but Sun Ah Poy has also reasons to desire similar vengeance of his own, and all too well we know how far his insane jealousy and lust will lead him. Regard me, if you please: As I have previously told you, I came across the world in search of Sun Ah Poy, and took him bloody-handed in commission of a crime of violence. Clear from Cambodia I trailed him, for there he met, and having met, desired a white girl-dancer in the mighty temple shrine at Angkor. Just who she was we do not know for certain, but strongly circumstantial evidence would indicate she was the daughter of a missionary gentleman named Crownshield, an American, who had been murdered by the natives at the instigation of the heathen priests and whose widowed mother had been spirited away and lodged within the temple until she knew the time of woman and her child was born. Then, we suppose, the mother, too, was done to death, and the little white girl reared as a *bayadère,* or temple-dancer.

"The years went on, and to Cambodia came a young countryman of yours, a citizen of Harrisonville, who met and loved this nameless mystery of a temple *coryphée,* known only as Thi-bah, the dancing-woman of the temple, and she returned his passion, for in Cambodia as elsewhere, like cries aloud to like, and this milk-skinned, violet-eyed inmate of a heathen shrine knew herself not akin to her brown-faced fellow members of the temple's *corps du ballet.*

"*Enfin,* they did elope and hasten to the young man's home in this city, and on their trail, blood-lustful as a tiger in the hunt, there followed Sun Ah Poy, determined to retake the girl whom he had purchased from the priests; if possible to slay the man on whom her favor rested, also. *Parbleu,* and as the shadow follows the body when the sun is low, Renouard did dog the footsteps of this Sun Ah Poy. Yes.

"*Tiens,* almost the wicked one succeeded in his plans for vengeance, but with the aid of Jules de Grandin, who is a clever fellow, for all his stupid looks and silly ways, I captured him and saved the little lady, now a happy wife and an American citizeness by marriage and adoption.

"How I then fared, how this miscreant of a Sun Ah Poy made apes and monkeys of the law and lodged himself all safely in a madhouse, I have already related. How he escaped and all but gave me my quietus you know from personal, first-hand experience. Certainly.

"Now, consider: Somewhere in the vicinage there lurk these two near-mad men with twin maggots of jealousy and vengeance gnawing at their brains. Your so unfortunate lady is already in their power—Konstantin has scored a point in his game of passion and revenge. But I know Sun Ah Poy. A merchant prince he was in former days, the son of generations of merchant princes, and Chinese merchant princes in the bargain.

"Such being so, I know all well that Sun Ah Poy has not united forces with this Konstantin unless he is assured of compensation. My death? *Pouf,* a bagatelle! Me he can kill—at least, he can attempt my life—whenever he desires, and do it all unaided. Last night we saw how great his resource is and how casually he tossed a stink-bomb through the window by way of telling me he was at liberty once more. No, no, my friend; he has not joined with Konstantin merely to be assured that Renouard goes home in one of those elaborate containers for the dead your undertakers sell. On the contrary. He seeks to regain the custody of her who flouted his advances and ran off with another man. Thus far his purpose coincides with Konstantin's. They both desire women whom other men have won. One has succeeded in his quest, at least for the time being; the other still must make his purpose good. Already they have run down a *gendarme* who stood in their way—thus far they work in concert. Beyond a doubt they will continue to be allies till their plans are consummated. Yes."

The clatter of the front-door knocker silenced him, and I rose to answer the alarm, knowing Nora McGinnis had long since gone to bed.

"Is there a feller named Renyard here?" demanded a hoarse voice as I swung back the door and beheld a most untidy taximan in the act of assaulting the knocker again.

"There's a gentleman named Renouard stopping here," I answered coldly. "What——"

"A'right, tell 'im to come out an' git his friend, then. He's out in me cab, drunk as a hard-boiled owl, an' won't stir a foot till this here Renyard feller comes fer 'im. Tell 'im to make it snappy, will yuh, buddy. This here Chinaman's so potted I'm scared he's goin' to——"

"A Chinaman?" I cut in sharply. "What sort of Chinaman?"

"A dam' skinny one, an' a mean one, too. Orderin' me about like I wuz a servant or sumpin', an'——"

"Renouard—de Grandin!" I called over my shoulder. "Come here, quickly, please! There's a Chinaman out there in that cab—'a skinny Chinaman,' the driver calls him—and he wants Renouard to come out to him. D'ye suppose——"

"Sacré nom d'un porc, I damn do!" de Grandin answered. To the taximan he ordered:

"Bring in your passenger at once, my friend. We can not come out to him; but——"

"Say, feller, I ain't takin' no more orders from a Frog than I am from a Chink, git me?" the cabman interposed truculently. "You'll come out an' git this here drunk, an' like it, or else——"

"Précisément; or else?" de Grandin shot back sharply, and the porch-light's rays gleamed on the wicked-looking bar-

rel of his small but deadly automatic pistol. "Will you obey me, or must I shoot?"

The taximan obeyed, though slowly, with many a backward, fearful glance, as though he did not know what instant the Frenchman's pistol might spit death. From the cab he helped a delicate, bent form muffled to the ears in a dark overcoat, and assisted it slowly up the steps. "Here he is," he muttered angrily, as he transferred his tottering charge to Renouard's waiting hands.

The shrouded form reeled weakly at each step as de Grandin and Renouard assisted it down the hall and guided it to an armchair by the fire. For a moment silence reigned within the study, the visitant crouching motionless in his seat and wheezing asthmatically at intervals. At length de Grandin crossed the room, took the wide brim of the black-felt hat which obscured the man's face in both his hands and wrenched the headgear off.

"Ah?" he ejaculated as the light struck upon the caller's face. *"A-a-ah?* I thought as much!"

Renouard breathed quickly, almost with a snort, as he beheld the livid countenance turned toward him. "Sun Ah Poy, thou species of a stinking camel, what filthy joke is this you play?" he asked suspiciously.

The Chinaman smiled with a sort of ghastly parody of mirth. His face seemed composed entirely of parchment-like skin stretched drum-tight above the bony processes; his little, deep-set eyes were terrible to look at as empty sockets in a skull; his lips, paper-thin and bloodless, were retracted from a set of broken and discolored teeth. The countenance was as lifeless and revolting as the mummy of Rameses in the British Museum, and differed from the dead man's principally in that it was instinct with conscious evil and lacked the majesty and repose of death.

"Does this look like a jest?" he asked in a low, faltering voice, and with a twisted, claw-like hand laid back a fold of his fur overcoat. The silken Chinese blouse within was stained with fresh, warm blood, and the gory spot grew larger with each pulsation of his heart.

"Morbleu, it seems you have collided with just retribution!" de Grandin commented dryly. "Is it that you are come to us for treatment, by any happy chance?"

"Partly," the other answered as another horrifying counterfeit of mirth writhed across his livid mouth. "Doctor Jules de Grandin is a surgeon and a man of honor; the oath of Esculapius and the obligation of his craft will not allow him to refuse aid to a wounded man who comes to him for succor, whoever that man may be."

"Eh bien, you have me there," de Grandin countered, "but I am under no compulsion to keep your presence here a secret. While I am working on your wound the police will be coming with all haste to take you back in custody. You realize that, of course?"

WE CUT away his shirt and singlet, for undressing him would have been too hazardous. To the left, between the fifth and sixth ribs, a little in front of the mid-axillary line, there gaped a long incised wound, obviously the result of a knife-thrust. Extensive hemorrhage had already taken place, and the patient was weakening quickly from loss of blood. "A gauze pack and styptic collodion," de Grandin whispered softly, "and then perhaps ten minims of adrenalin; it's all that we can do, I fear. The state will save electric current by this evening's work, my friend; he'll never live to occupy the chair of execution."

The treatment finished, we propped the patient up with pillows. "Doctor Sun," de Grandin announced professionally, "it is my duty to inform you that death is

very near. I greatly doubt that you will live till morning."

"I realize that," the other answered weakly, "nor am I sorry it is so. This wound has brought me back my sanity, and I am once again the man I was before I suffered madness. All I have done while I was mentally deranged comes back to me like memories of a disagreeable dream, and when I think of what I was, and what I have become, I am content that Sun Ah Poy should die.

"But before I go I must discharge my debt—pay you my fee," he added with another smile, and this time, I thought, there was more of gentleness than irony in the grimace. "My time is short and I must leave some details out, but such facts as you desire shall be yours," he added.

"This morning I met Konstantin the Russian as I fled the police, and we agreed to join forces to combat you. He seemed to be a man beset, like me, by the police, and gladly did I welcome him as ally." He paused a moment, and a quick spasm of pain flickered in his face, but he fought it down. "In the East we learn early of some things the Western world will never learn," he gasped. "The lore of China is filled with stories of some beings whose existence you deride. Yet they are real, though happily they become more rare each day. Konstantin is one of them; not wholly man, nor yet entirely demon, but a dreadful hybrid of the two. Not till he'd taken me to his lair did I discover this—he is a servant of the Evil One.

"It cost my life to come and tell you, but *he must be exterminated*. My life for his; the bargain is a trade by which the world will profit. What matters Sun Ah Poy beside the safety of humanity? Konstantin is virtually immortal, but he *can* be killed. Unless you hunt him out and slay him——"

"We know all this," de Grandin interrupted; "at least, I have suspected it. Tell us while you have time where we may find him, and I assure you we shall do to him according to his sins——"

"Old Shepherd's Inn, near Chestertown—the old, deserted place padlocked three years ago for violation of the Prohibition law," the Chinaman broke in. "You'll find him there at night, and with him—go there before the moon has set; by day he is abroad, and with him goes his captive, held fast in bonds of fear, but when the moon has climbed the heavens——" He broke off with a sigh of pain, and little beads of perspiration shone upon his brow. The man was going fast; the pauses between his words were longer, and his voice was scarcely louder than a whisper.

"Renouard"—he rolled his head toward the Inspector—"in the old days you called me friend. Can you forget the things I did in madness and say good-bye to the man you used to know—will you take my hand, Renouard? I can not hold it out to you—I am too weak, but——"

"Assuredly, I shall do more, *mon vieux*," Renouard broke in. "*Je vous salue!*" He drew himself erect and raised his right hand in stiff and formal military greeting. Jules de Grandin followed suit.

Then, in turn, they took the dying man's hand in theirs and shook it solemnly.

"Shades — of — honorable — ancestors, comes — now — Sun — Ah — Poy to be among—you!" the Oriental gasped, and as he finished speaking a rattle sounded in his throat and from the corners of his mouth there trickled thin twin streams of blood. His jaw relaxed, his eyes were set and glazed, his breast fluttered once or twice, then all was done.

"Quicker than I thought," de Grandin commented as he lifted the spare, twisted

body from the chair and laid it on the couch, then draped a rug over it. "The moment I perceived his wound I knew the pleural wall was punctured, and it was but a matter of moments before internal hemorrhage set in and killed him, but my calculations erred. I would have said half an hour; he has taken only eighteen minutes to die. We must notify the coroner," he added practically. "This news will bring great happiness to the police, and rejoice the newspapers most exceedingly, as well."

"I wonder how he got that wound?" I asked.

"You wonder?" he gave me an astonished glance. "Last night we saw how Konstantin can throw a knife—Renouard's shoulder is still sore in testimony of his skill. The wonder is he got away at all. I wish he had not died so soon; I should have liked to ask him how he did it."

7. *Though This Be Damnation*

SHEPHERD'S INN was limned against the back-drop of wind-driven snow like the gigantic carcass of a stranded leviathan. Remote from human habitation or activity, it stood in the midst of its overgrown grounds, skeletal remains of small summer-houses where in other days Bacchus had dallied drunkenly with Aphrodite stood starkly here and there among the rank-grown evergreens and frost-blasted weeds; flanking the building on the left was a row of frontless wooden sheds where young bloods of the nineties had stabled horse and buggy while reveling in the bar or numerous private dining-rooms upstairs; a row of hitching-posts for tethering the teams of more transient guests stood ranked before the porch. The lower windows were heavily barred by rusted iron rods without and stopped by stout wooden shutters within. Even creepers seemed to have felt the blight which rested on the place, for there was no patch of ivy green upon the brickwork which extended upward to the limit of the lower story.

Beneath a wide-boughed pine we paused for council. "Sergeant," de Grandin ordered, "you and Friend Trowbridge will enter at the rear—I have here the key which fits the door. Keep watchful eyes as you advance, and have your guns held ready, for you may meet with desperate resistance. I would advise that one of you precede the other, and that the first man hold the flashlight, and hold it well out from his body. Thus, if you're seen by Konstantin and he fires or flings a knife at the light, you will suffer injury only to your hand or arm. Meanwhile, the one behind will keep sharp watch and fire at any sound or movement in the dark—a shotgun is most pleasantly effective at any range which can be had within a house.

"Should you come on him unawares, shoot first and parley afterward. This is a foul thing we face tonight, my friends—one does not parley with a rattlesnake, neither does one waste time with a viper such as this. *Non,* by no means. And as you hope for pardon of your sins, shoot him but once; no matter what transpires, you are not to fire a second shot. Remember.

"Renouard and I shall enter from the front and work our way toward you. You shall know when we are come by the fact that our flashlight will be blue—the light in that I give you will be red, so you may shoot at any but a blue light, and we shall blaze away whenever anything but red is shown. You understand?"

"Perfectly, sor," the Irishman returned.

We stumbled through the snow until we reached the rear door and Costello knelt to fit the key into the lock while I stood guard above him with my gun.

"You or me, sor?" he inquired as the

lock unlatched, and even in the excitement of the moment I noted that its mechanism worked without a squeak.

"Eh?" I answered.

"Which of us carries th' light?"

"Oh. Perhaps I'd better. You're probably a better shot than I."

"O. K. Lead th' way, sor, an' watch your shtep. I'll be right behint ye."

Cautiously we crept through the service hall, darting the red rays of our flash to left and right, through the long-vacant dining-room, finally into the lobby at the front. As yet we saw no sign of Konstantin nor did we hear a sound betokening the presence of de Grandin or Renouard.

The foyer was paved with flagstones set in cement sills, and every now and then these turned beneath our feet, all but precipitating us upon our faces. The air was heavy and dank with that queer, unwholesome smell of earth one associates with graves and tombs; the painted woodwork was dust-grimed and dirty and here and there wallpaper had peeled off in leprous strips, exposing patches of the corpse-gray plaster underneath. From the center of the hall, slightly to the rear, there rose a wide grand staircase of wood. A sweep of my flashlight toward this brought an exclamation of surprize from both of us.

The central flight of stairs which led to the landing whence the side-flights branched to left and right, was composed of three steps and terminated in a platform some six feet wide by four feet deep. On this had been placed some sort of packing-case or table—it was impossible to determine which at the quick glance we gave it, and over this was draped a cover of some dark material which hung down nearly to the floor. Upon this darker covering there lay a strip of linen cloth and upright at the center of the case was fixed some sort of picture or framed object, while at either end there stood what I first took to be candelabra, each with three tall black candles set into its sockets. "Why," I began in a whisper, "it looks like an——"

"Whist, Doctor Trowbridge, sor, there's some one comin'!" Costello breathed in my ear. "Shall I let 'em have it?" I heard the sharp click of his gun-lock in the dark.

"There's a door behind us," I whispered back. "Suppose we take cover behind it and watch to see what happens? If it's our man and he comes in here, he'll have to pass us, and we can jump out and nab him; if it's de Grandin and Renouard, we'll hail them and let them know there's no one in the rear of the house. What d'ye say?"

"A'right," he acquiesced. "Let's go."

We stepped back carefully, and I heard Costello fumbling with the door. "O. K., sor, it's open," he whispered. "Watch your shtep goin' over th' sill; it's a bit high."

I followed him slowly, feeling my way with cautious feet, felt his big bulk brush past me as he moved to close the door; then:

"Howly Moses!" he muttered. "It's a trap we're in, sor! It were a snap-lock on th' door. Who th' devil'd 'a' thought o' *that?*"

He was right. As the door swung to there came a faint, sharp click of a spring-lock, and though we strained and wrenched at the handle, the strong oak panels refused to budge.

The room in which we were imprisoned was little larger than a closet, windowless and walled with tongue-and-groove planks in which a line of coat-hooks had been screwed. Obviously at one time it had functioned as a sort of cloak room. For some reason the management had fancied decorations in the door, and some five feet from the floor twin designs of interlacing hearts had

been bored through the panels with an auger. I blessed the unknown artist who had made the perforations, for they not only supplied our dungeon generously with air but made it possible for us to see all quarters of the lobby without betraying our proximity.

"Don't be talkin', sor," Costello warned. "There's some one comin'!"

THE door across the lobby opened slowly, and through it, bearing a sacristan's taper, came a cowled and surpliced figure, an ecclesiastical-looking figure which stepped with solemn pace to the foot of the staircase, sank low in genuflection, then mounted to the landing and lit the candles on the right, retreated, genuflected again, then lit companion candles at the left.

As the wicks took fire and spread a little patch of flickering luminance amid the dark, my first impression was confirmed. The box-like object on the stairs was an altar, clothed and vested in accordance with the rubric of the Orthodox Greek Church; at each end burned a trinity of sable candles which gave off an unpleasant smell, and in the center stood a gilt-framed ikon.

Now the light fell full upon the sacristan's face and with a start I recognized Dmitri, the burly Russian Renouard had felled the night we first met Konstantin and Sonia.

The leering altar-wait retired, backed reverently from the parodied sanctuary, returned to the room whence he had entered, and in a moment we heard the sound of chanting mingled with the sharp, metallic clicking of a censer's chains.

Again Dmitri entered, this time swinging a smoking incense-pot, and close behind him, vested as a Russian priest, walked a tall, impressive figure. Above his sacerdotal garb his face stood out sharply in the candles' lambent light, smooth-shaven, long-jawed, swarthy of complexion. His coal-black eyes were deep-set under curiously arched brows; his lusterless black hair was parted in the middle and brushed abruptly backward, leaving a down-pointing triangle in the center of his high and narrow forehead which indicated the commencement of a line which was continued in the prominent bowed nose and sharp, out-jutting chin. It was a striking face, a proud face, a face of great distinction, but a face so cruel and evil it reminded me at once of every pictured image of the devil which I had ever seen. Held high between his upraised hands the evil-looking man bore carefully a large chalice of silver-gilt with a paten fitted over it for cover.

The floating cloud of incense stung my nostrils. I sniffed and fought away a strong impulse to sneeze. And all the while my memory sought to classify that strong and pungent odor. Suddenly I knew. On a vacation trip to Egypt I had spent an evening at an Arab camp out in the desert and watched them build their fires of camel-dung. That was it, the strong smell of ammonia, the faintly sickening odor of the carbonizing fumet!

Chanting slowly in a deep, melodious voice, his attendant chiming in with the responses, the mock-priest marched to the altar and placed the sacred vessels on the faircloth where the candle-rays struck answering gleams from their cheap gilding. Then with a deep obeisance he retreated, turned, and strode toward the doorway whence he came.

Three paces from the portal he came to pause and struck his hands together in resounding claps, once, twice, three times; and though I had no intimation what I was about to see, I felt my heart beat faster and a curious weakness spread through all my limbs as I waited breathlessly.

Into the faint light of the lobby, vague and nebulous as a phantom-form half seen, half apprehended, stepped Sonia. Slowly, with an almost regal dignity she moved. She was enfolded from white throat to insteps in a long and clinging cloak of heavily embroidered linen which one beautiful, slim hand clutched tight round her at the breast. Something familiar yet queerly strange about the garment struck me as she paused. I'd seen its like somewhere, but never on a woman—the candlelight struck full upon it, and I knew. It was a Greek priest's white-linen over-vestment, an alb, for worked upon it in threads of gold and threads of silver and threads of iridescent color were double-barred Lorraine crosses and three mystic Grecian letters.

"Are you prepared?" the pseudo-priest demanded as he bent his lusterless black eyes upon the girl's pale face.

"I am prepared," she answered slowly. "Though this be damnation to my soul and everlasting corruption to my body, I am prepared, if only you will promise me that he shall go unharmed!"

"Think well," the man admonished, "this rite may be performed only with the aid of a woman pure in heart—a woman in whom there can be found no taint or stain of sin—who gives herself willingly and without reserve, to act the part I call on you to play. Are *you* such an one?"

"I am such an one," she answered steadily, though a ripple of heart-breaking horror ran across her blenching lips, even as they formed the words.

"And you make the offer willingly, without reserve?" he taunted. "You know what it requires? What the consequences to your flesh and soul must be?" With a quick motion he fixed his fingers in her short, blond hair and bent her head back till he gazed directly down into her upturned eyes. *"Willingly?"* he grated. "Without reserve?"

"Willingly," she answered with a choking sob. "Yes, willingly, ten thousand times ten thousand times I offer up my soul and body without a single reservation, if you will promise——"

"Then let us be about it!" he broke in with a low, almost soundless laugh.

Dmitri, who had crouched before the altar, descended with his censer and bowed before the girl till his forehead touched the floor. Then he arose and wrapped the loose ends of his stole about him and passed the censer to the other man, while from a fold of his vestments he drew a strange metal plate shaped like an angel with five-fold outspread wings, and this he waved above her head while she moved slowly toward the altar and the other man walked backward, facing her and censing her with reeking fumes at every step.

A gleam of golden slippers shone beneath her cloak as she approached the lowest of the altar steps, but as she halted for a moment she kicked them quickly off and mounted barefoot to the sanctuary, where she paused a breathless second and blessed herself, but in reverse, commencing at a point below her breast and making the sign of the cross upside-down.

Then on her knees she fell, placing both hands upon the altar-edge and dropping her head between them, and groveled there in utter self-abasement while in a low but steady voice she repeated words which sent the chills of horror through me.

I had not looked inside a Greek book for more than thirty years, but enough of early learning still remained for me to translate what she sang so softly in a firm, sweet voice:

"My soul doth magnify the Lord,
And my spirit hath rejoiced
In God my Savior,
For He hath regarded the lowliness
Of His handmaiden . . ."

The canticle was finished. She rose and dropped the linen cloak behind her and stretched her naked body on the altar, where she lay beneath the candles' softly glowing light like some exquisite piece of carven Carrara marble, still, lifeless, cold.

Chalice and paten were raised and placed upon the living altar-cloth, their hard, metallic weight denting the soft breasts and exquisite torso, their silver-gilt reflecting little halos of brightness on the milk-white skin. The vested man's voice rose and fell in what seemed to me an endless chant, his kneeling deacon's heavy guttural intoning the response. On, endlessly on, went the deep chant of celebration, pausing a breathless moment now and then as the order of the service directed that the celebrant should kiss the consecrated place of sacrifice, then hot and avid lips pressed shrinking, wincing flesh.

Now the rite was ended. The priest raised high the chalice with its hallowed contents and turned his back upon the living altar with a scream of cachinnating laughter. "Lucifer, Lord of the World and Prince Supreme of all the Powers of the Air, I hold thy adversary in my hands!" he cried. "To Thee the Victory, Mighty Master, Puissant God of Hell—behold I sacrifice to Thee the Nazarene! His blood be on our heads and on our children's——"

"*Eh bien, Monsieur,* I know not of your offspring, but blood assuredly shall be on your head, and that right quickly!" said Jules de Grandin, appearing suddenly in the darkness at the altar-side. A stab of lurid flame, a sharp report, and Konstantin fell forward on his face, a growing smear of blood-stain on his forehead.

A second shot roared answer to the first, and the crouching man in deacon's robes threw up both hands wildly, as though to hold himself by empty air, then leaned slowly to the left, slid down the altar steps and lay upon the floor, a blotch of moveless shadow in the candlelight.

Inspector Renouard appeared from the altar's farther side, his smoking service revolver in his hand, a smile of satisfaction on his face. "*Tiens,* my aim is true as yours, *mon* Jules," he announced matter-of-factly. "Shall I give the woman one as well?"

"By no means, no," de Grandin answered quickly. "Give her rather the charity of covering for her all-charming nudity, my friend. Quick, spread the robe over her."

Renouard obeyed, and as he dropped the desecrated alb on the still body I saw a look of wonder come into his face. "She is unconscious," he breathed. "She faints, my Jules; will you revive her?"

"All in good time," the other answered. "First let us look at this." He stirred the prostrate Konstantin with the toe of his boot.

How it happened I could not understand, for de Grandin's bullet had surely pierced his frontal bone, inflicting an instantly-fatal wound, but the prone man stirred weakly and whimpered like a child in pain.

"Have mercy!" he implored. "I suffer. Give me a second shot to end my misery. Quick, for pity's sake; I am in agony!"

De Grandin smiled unpleasantly. "So the lieutenant of the firing-party thought," he answered. "So the corporal who administered *le coup de grâce* believed, my friend. Them you could fool; you can not make a monkey out of Jules de Grandin. No; by no means. Lie here and die, my excellent adorer of the Devil, but do not take too long in doing it, for we fire the building within the quarter-hour, and if you have not finished dying by that time, *tiens*"—he raised his shoulders in a shrug—"the fault is yours, not ours. No."

"Hi, there, Doctor de Grandin, sor; don't be after settin' fire to this bloody

devils' roost wid me an Doctor Trowbridge cooped up in here!" Costello roared.

"Morbleu," the little Frenchman laughed as he unlocked our prison, "upon occasion I have roasted both of you, my friends, but luckily I did not do it actually tonight. Come, let us hasten. We have work to do."

Within the suite which Konstantin had occupied in the deserted house we found sufficient blankets to wrap Sonia against the outside cold, and having thus prepared her for the homeward trip, we set fire to the ancient house in a dozen different spots and hastened toward my waiting car.

Red, mounting flames illuminated our homeward way, but we made no halt to watch our handiwork, for Sonia was moaning in delirium, and her hands and face were hot and dry as though she suffered from typhoid.

"To bed with her," de Grandin ordered when we reached my house. "We shall administer hyoscin and later give her strychnia and brandy; meanwhile we must inform her husband that the missing one is found and safe. Yes; he will be pleased to hear us say so, I damn think."

8. *The Tangled Skein Unraveled*

JULES DE GRANDIN, smelling most agreeably of *Giboulées de Mai* toilet water and dusting-powder, extremely dapper-looking in his dinner clothes and matching black-pearl stud and cuff-links, decanted a fluid ounce or so of Napoleon brandy from the silver-mounted pinch bottle standing handily upon the tabouret beside his easy-chair, passed the wide-mouthed goblet beneath his nose, sniffing the ruby liquor's aroma with obvious approval, then sipped a thimbleful with evident appreciation.

"Attend me," he commanded, fixing small bright eyes in turn on Donald Tanis and his wife, Detective Sergeant Costello, Renouard and me. "When dear Madame Sonia told us of her strange adventures with this Konstantin, I was amazed, no less. It is not given every woman to live through such excitement and retain her faculties, much less to sail at last into the harbor of a happy love, as she has done. Her father's fate also intrigued me. I'd heard of his strange suicide and how he did denounce the Bolshevik spy, so I was well prepared to join with Monsieur Tanis and tell her that she was mistaken when she declared the man who kidnapped her was Konstantin. I knew the details of his apprehension and his trial; also I knew he fell before the firing-squad.

"Ah, but Jules de Grandin has the open mind. To things which others call impossible he gives consideration. So when I heard the tale of Konstantin's execution at Vincennes, and heard how he had been at pains to learn if they would give him the mercy-shot, and when I further heard how he did not die at once, although eight rifle-balls had pierced his breast; I thought, and thought right deeply. Here were the facts——" he checked them off upon his outspread fingers:

"Konstantin was Russian; Konstantin had been shot by eight skilled riflemen —four rifles in the firing-squad of twelve were charged with blanks—he had not died at once, so a mercy-shot was given, and this seemed to kill him to death. So far, so ordinary. But ah, there were extraordinary factors in the case, as well. *Oui-da.* Of course. Before he suffered execution Konstantin had said some things which showed he might have hope of returning once again to wreak grave mischief on those he hated. Also, Madame Sonia had deposed it had been he who kidnapped her. She was unlikely

to have been mistaken. Women do not make mistakes in matters of that kind. No. Assuredly not. Also, we must remember, Konstantin was Russian. That is of great importance.

"Russia is a mixture, a potpourri of mutual conflicting elements. Neither European nor Asiatic, neither wholly civilized nor savage, modern on the surface, she is unchanging as the changeless East in which her taproots lie. Always she has harbored evil things which were incalculably old when the first deep stones of Egypt's mighty pyramids were laid.

"Now, together with the werewolf and the vampire, the warlock and the witch, the Russian knows another demon-thing called *callicantzaros,* who is a being neither wholly man nor devil, but an odd and horrifying mixture of the two. Some call them foster-children of the Devil, stepsons of Satan; some say they are the progeny of evil, sin-soaked women and the incubi who are their paramours. They are imbued with semi-immortality, also; for though they may be killed like other men, they must be slain with a single fatal blow; a second stroke, although it would at once kill ordinary humankind, restores their lives—and their power for wickedness.

"So much for the means of killing a *callicantzaros*—and the means to be avoided. To continue:

"Every so often, preferably once each year about the twenty-fifth of February, the olden feast of St. Walburga, or at the celebration of St. Peter's Chains on August 1, he must perform the sacrilege known as the Black Mass or Mass to Lucifer, and hold thereby Satanic favor and renew his immortality.

"Now this Black Mass must be performed with certain rules and ceremonies, and these must be adhered to to the letter. The altar is the body of an unclothed woman, and she must lend herself with willingness to the dreadful part she plays. If she be tricked or made to play the part by force, the rite is null and void. Moreover, she must be without a taint or spot of wickedness, a virtuous woman, pure in heart—to find a one like that for such a service is no small task, you will agree.

"When we consider this we see why Konstantin desired Madame Sonia for wife. She was a Russian like himself, and Russian women are servient to their men. Also, by beatings and mistreatment he soon could break what little independence she possessed, and force her to his will. Thus he would be assured of the 'altar' for his Devil's Mass.

"But when he had procured the 'altar' the work was but begun. The one who celebrated this unclean rite must do so fully vested as a priest, and he must wear the sacred garments which have been duly consecrated. Furthermore he must use the consecrated elements at the service, and also the sacred vessels.

"If the Host can be stolen from a Latin church or the presanctified elements from an altar of the Greek communion, it is necessary only that the ritual be fulfilled, the benediction said, and then defilement of the elements be made in insult of the powers of Heaven and to the satisfaction of the Evil One. But if the Eucharist is unobtainable, then it is necessary to have a duly ordained priest, one who is qualified to cause the mystery of transubstantiation to take place, to say the office. If this form be resorted to, there is a further awful rite to be performed. A little baby, most usually a boy, who has not been baptized, but whose baby lips are too young and pure for speech and whose soft feet have never made a step, must be taken, and as the celebrant pronounces '*Hoc est enim corpus meum,*' he cuts the helpless infant's throat and drains the gushing lifeblood into the chalice, thus mingling it with the transmuted wine.

"It was with knowledge of these facts that I heard Father Pophosepholos report his loss, and when he said the elements were stolen I did rejoice most greatly, for then I knew no helpless little one would have to die upon the altar of the Devil's Mass.

"And so, with Madame Sonia gone, with the elements and vestments stolen from St. Basil's Church and with my dark suspicions of this Konstantin's true character, I damn knew what was planned, but how to find this server of the Devil, this stepson of Satan, in time to stop the sacrilege? Ah, that was the question! Assuredly.

"And then came Sun Ah Poy. A bad man he had been, a very damn-bad man, as Friend Renouard can testify; but China is an old, old land and her sons are steeped in ancient lore. For generations more than we can count they've known the demon *Ch'ing Shih* and his ghostly brethren, who approximate the vampires of the West, and greatly do they fear him. They hate and loathe him, too, and there lay our salvation; for wicked as he was, Doctor Sun would have no dealings with this cursed Konstantin, but came to warn us and to tell us where he might be found, although his coming cost his life.

"And so we went and saw and were in time to stop the last obscenity of all—the defilement of the consecrated Eucharist in honor of the Devil. Yes. Of course."

"But, Doctor de Grandin, I *was* the altar at that mass," Sonia Tanis wailed, "and I *did* offer myself for the Devil's service! Is there hope for such as I? Will Heaven ever pardon me? For even though I loathed the thing I did, I *did* it, and"—she faced us with defiant, blazing eyes—"I'd do it again for——"

"Précisément, Madame," de Grandin interrupted. " 'For——' That 'for' is your salvation; because you did the thing you did for love of him you married to save him from assassination. 'Love conquers all,' the Latin poet tells us. So in this case. Between your sin—if sin it were to act the part you did to save your husband's life—and its reward, we place the shield of your abundant love. Be assured, *chère Madame,* you have no need to fear, for kindly Heaven understands, and understanding is forgiveness."

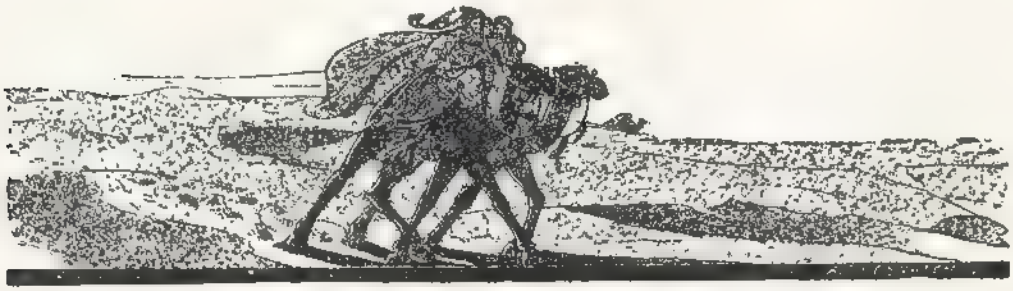
"But," the girl persisted, her long, white fingers knit together in an agony of terror, her eyes wide-set with fear, "Donald would never have consented to my buying his safety at such a price, he——"

"Madame," the little Frenchman fairly thundered, "I am Jules de Grandin. I do not make mistakes. When I say something, it is so. I have assured you of your pardon; will you dispute with me?"

"Oh, Sonia," the husband soothed, "it's finished, now, there is no more——"

"Hélas, the man speaks truth, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin wailed. "It is finished—there is no more! How true, my friend; how sadly true.

"The bottle, it is empty!"



"Ahead of them, floating in space —a face."

DEADLOCK

By EVERIL WORRELL

The story of an eery and fearsome flight to the limits of our solar system and back again in an airplane

PERHAPS Nikky was an East Indian prince—if he wasn't a thug. Perhaps he was an East Indian thug—if he wasn't a prince. Whichever he was—or both—he was Gerald's wife's husband. Rather an awful thing, that.

Gerald sat between his wife and her husband, Nikky, and he faced his mother-in-law. She—Mrs. Montrose—had done this thing to Sidney—had made a bigamist, really, of her daughter Sidney. Sidney was feeling the shame of it now. Gerald tried to assure himself that things must come out well in the end. Wasn't he the real, the first and legal husband—not to mention being the eternally dear love of Sidney's heart? But the obstacles! Old Mrs. Montrose's title-greed. Nikky's determination to hang onto the Montrose million.

And so, with all that between them, the four sat together in the Montrose summer cottage, empty of servants now and facing in somber loneliness a strip of somber autumn shore and a dark ocean that sang of the coming of winter. And in his heart of hearts Gerald, intrepid explorer-inventor, felt that tonight Nikky meant to

murder him; and that if he succeeded Mrs. Montrose wouldn't care—would even help to hide evidence and smooth things over, and would somehow force Sidney to go on as Nikky's wife.

Sidney's desperate little voice broke the long silence.

"Gerald," she said, her voice sounding like little bells jangling all out of tune, "fly your plane back to the city tonight. We've gotten nowhere—settled nothing. I'd go with you, only—only——"

Gerald understood. If Sidney made a move to go with him, old Mrs. Montrose would have a heart attack. He had seen her have one. It was no wonder Sidney would sell her soul to avoid them.

Sidney continued: "Somehow, Gerald, I feel you aren't—*safe*—though it must be my nerves. I don't know what I fear. Gerald, you aren't—armed? No revolver?"

"I don't usually carry a gun——" Gerald began, but Nikky interrupted him.

"If your explorer isn't safe, Sidney, it is because he knows that the *gentlemanly* thing would be for him to—well, to drop out, to eliminate himself. *He may do that*——"

Gerald felt the hair rise on his scalp. There was something behind his intuitive sense of danger, he was sure. A murder that looked like suicide—that might be the ticket. He half rose from his seat.

"I beg you'll come with me, Sidney!" he cried. "After all, you're *my* wife. And you wouldn't have married the prince while you thought I was lost at the pole, if your mother hadn't dragged you into it. You're my wife still. Come!"

He thought she *would* come—for a moment. Then a suffocating sound made him look at his wife's mother. Her face was purple, cyanosed; was she holding her breath?

Sidney cried in agony: "Go without me, Gerald. I'll do what I can—later. The doctor said these attacks were both real and feigned—and I can't tell them apart. Dear God, forgive me, I can't kill my own mother—I'd rather kill myself! I—must stay here tonight, Gerald. Please go!"

"I'm staying, too!" Gerald said shortly.

By degrees far too rapid, old Mrs. Montrose recovered. "Why did we come here—we four?" she begged.

"Your idea, and the prince's—to talk things over." Gerald's reminder was curt. "To see who should drop out of the triangle — to persuade me to drop out, really. We'll get no farther tonight, as Sidney said, and so good-night. My room?"

GERALD was shown his room—by Nikky. He saw his bed—an old four-poster he had slept in once, at least, when Nikky was not host here.

When Nikky was gone, he lay down on the bed. Because he had thrown himself face down, he noticed a thing he was not meant to notice. It was the undersheet of the bed.

Of stout linen and uncommonly large, it was, and not tucked under the mattress—a slouchy and uncomfortable way of making a bed. Moreover, it was hemmed deeply on the sides—not only at top and bottom. And idle curiosity led Gerald to discover that a heavy cord ran along the edge of the sheet, inside the hem. At that point he got off the bed and continued his investigation standing—or rather, walking around the bed. He stood for some minutes frowning at a "break" in the middle of the side hem—on the side nearest the door.

And then he took his revolver out of his pocket and carefully inspected it. The sentence he had not finished in response to Sidney's question had been deliberate-

ly misleading. He did not go armed—usually. But tonight he carried a gun. He did not trust Nikky. The only trouble was that Nikky would be armed also. Gerald's great advantage would lie in Nikky's cowardice. Thug methods would be his chosen ones, and to make use of those he must wait his opportunity.

Gerald frowned, regarding that sheet equipped with—yes, with a draw string, and a stout one. Gerald was not a coward, but something like goose-flesh was creeping over him now. Sheet—net—and shroud! Nikky had prepared for him tonight, and had meant him to find all three of those in the old four-poster.

Tonight there would be, then, a conflict to the death. Strength—lead—wits—any of these might be the deciding weapon. Or it might be—Gerald squared his straight shoulders and drew a deep breath—it might be science. The trying out of a thing beyond the range, perhaps, of human daring not goaded by desperate necessity.

"And—Sidney!" Gerald spoke as though she were beside him. "If I risk your life too, dear—at least I'll not leave you to be slave to that murderous little beast!"

Now, he must wait for Nikky. And while he waited, he thought that he might as well search the room—though probably he would find nothing more.

But he did. Under the edge of the carpet, near the door, he caught the shine of white paper. And, drawing out a sealed envelope and tearing it open, he knew a recurrence of the goose-flesh of a minute ago.

This, typed even to the signature—his own signature!—was the message that stared up at him:

I hope the details of my suicide need not reach the public ear. If, however, my hope is vain, I leave this word behind, in explanation—in a last endeavor to avert scandal from the head of one dear to me.

During my absence, my wife was remarried, believing me dead. She has married a splendid fellow—a man worthy of her.

Reading that, Gerald could not even now repress a grim smile.

My return [the document continued] would precipitate a most painful situation. I am satisfied that my wife's love belongs to Prince Nicholas. In order to simplify this painful situation, I have decided to remove myself. I have come alone to this place. It was believed that I froze in the arctic regions. With the wish that I had indeed done so, I thought of the huge electric refrigerator which was installed in this summer lodge before I went away. I have connected the electric plant and turned on the refrigerator for fast freezing and I intend to enter the refrigerator box and slam the door. There—as I failed to do in the fastnesses of the far South—I shall simply fall asleep.

My last supplication is that no publicity be given this matter. GERALD LAMONT.

Gerald found himself breathing a bit jerkily. It was all so horribly planned out. That typed signature might be explained by the hypothesis that he had no pen or pencil at hand when he dashed off the despairing note—and his portable typewriter was, as always, in his plane. Nikky knew he never moved without that. The literary style of the note was that of Prince Nicholas rather than his own—but who would press that point?

Nikky intended to come to his room, of course, after he should be asleep; to draw up that heavy cord around the border of the innocent-appearing lethal sheet; perhaps to tap him gently on the head—more likely to use a little chloroform or ether, and possibly to use nothing at all, since a man in a net is as helpless now as in the day of Agamemnon; to cart him, anyway, down to the refrigerator and cram him into it—and, after he had been sufficiently frozen and suffocated, to open the door, remove the sheet and leave the dead or dying body for accidental discovery next summer. Typewriter and suicide note would have been arranged in Gerald's room, and on some pretext Nikky would get Mrs. Montrose and Sidney to leave suddenly without seeing

Gerald again. Nikky could pilot a plane. Nikky of course could think of a thousand ways and means, and Mrs. Montrose would support him in anything—even, almost, Gerald wondered with a new, sick shudder, in murder. If Sidney's mother knew how Nikky planned to rid her of her legitimate son-in-law—well, she'd take refuge in obtuseness, perhaps; that was a thing she could not do if she were compelled to witness the murder itself. Worst of all fates, worse far than mere death for himself, was the idea of leaving Sidney a moment longer helpless in the hands of her mother and this second husband.

Now, the thing to do would be to wait. Whatever Gerald might do in self-defense would be justified—but with the Montrose money against him, his case wouldn't be easy to prove if he should harm Nikky—for old Mrs. Montrose controlled that money. Supposing he shot Nikky, and produced the sheet and the false suicide note as reasons—Mrs. Montrose would swear it was a plant—she would see him as villain, and before long she'd believe she heard him threaten Nikky, threaten to kill him and blacken his memory in Sidney's eyes. Besides, even now, Gerald couldn't simply shoot Nikky down in cold blood—even though the only safe kind of a Nikky to have around would be a dead Nikky.

No. He must wait. He must—even lie down on that bed. And first—he must put out the light.

Of course he had locked his door. Normally, he would do that. And of course Nikky was fully equipped as any thug would be, with skeleton key, and so on.

His nails digging into the palms of his hands, Gerald lay still and heard his key pushed out of the lock, after a stealthy sound of turning in the ratchets—heard its very soft fall upon the rug. Lip between teeth till a warm saltiness trickled inside his mouth, he lay still while a narrow line of light showed the door opening — while a slender, crouching figure filled the broader band of dim light, and Nikky had gotten well into the room.

Not till then did Gerald move, and then he only moved his right hand, and his lips, and the one word he flung out gave Nikky credit—correctly—for plenty of intelligence:

"Deadlock!"

The slender, crouching figure might have been a bronze statue. Gerald rose from the bed, and amplified his description of the situation.

"Nikky"—he used the familiar diminutive as one would use such a name belonging to a rather despicable cur—"Nikky, I have you covered. And you have me covered. As I said, I usually do not go armed, but tonight is not a usual night. All right. What are we going to do about it? First, please snap on the electric light. You can keep me covered while you do it, and I like to see the eyes of a man when I talk to him—even the eyes of a man like you. Thanks."

The light showed Nikky's face more thuggish, more coldly, snakily swarthy than it usually seemed to Gerald—which was saying much.

"I'm afraid," Gerald said slowly, "that we are going to see a good deal of each other for a while, Nikky. And the pleasure won't be mine. But it is what I've called it, you see. Complete deadlock.

"You know, if you didn't know before, that I won't trust Sidney to you or even to her mother. Yes, I found the note under the carpet. What kind of unobservant fool do you think I am? East Indians always imagine the Occidental mind to be obtuse, because it doesn't deal by choice in the unwholesome traffic of

the Oriental. If I wanted to murder a man, for instance, I'd shoot him, and perhaps try not to be found out. A bed that is a death trap, refrigeration alive—things like that I'd leave to you. So that if I get away alive you'll have to get clear away from this country to be safe, if I let you off to save scandal, as you put it in the note. You typed it on my machine—when? A while ago you brought a little firewood in—I suppose you got into the plane then. It doesn't matter.

"Well, so you daren't let me get away alive. Yet you daren't just shoot me down unless you have to to save your life: the shot would be heard, and in spite of her mother—and family name be damned—Sidney would put you through.

"And of course you know I can't just shoot you down for a number of reasons. If you'd give up Sidney and the Montrose money—the whole game—get clear away—I might let you go. You won't give up? No, you needn't scowl and shake your head. I knew that well enough. It would be a long time before you found anything as soft as Mrs. Montrose makes life for you—and you're wild about Sidney.

"Neither of us wants to shoot it out. Neither of us will go away. Neither of us dares turn his back on the other. I doubt if you have any suggestion. I have—and you'll take it, hoping for a chance to kill me without being found out.

"My suggestion is this. My plane will carry four. We'll all four get into it. I will give my gun to Sidney—if you shoot me while we're starting, I know she'll get you—but then, both she and her mother would see you do it so clearly, and in cold blood, that even Mrs. Montrose would have to testify against you, let alone Sidney. If you shoot me at any time while we're in the air, we crash—so you'll not do that, whatever circumstances may arise. And of course, since I won't have my gun, under no circumstances and under no pretext can I take a shot at you.

"When we land—ah, well, that's where the thing will come to some sort of climax, of course. Some time, we'll have to. And then the game will be on again. My plan will give me a chance to think, and it will give you a chance to think. With your intellect, you should be able to plan something highly ingenious in the way of murder during a long airplane trip. The element of chance may enter in, after that landing. Now, Nikky—I pause for your reply."

Nikky's evil face glistened slightly in the bright overhead light. He waited a moment, then licked his lips.

"My reply begins with a question, most great and daring explorer!" he sneered. "Is it part of your plan to make for some inaccessible part of the earth, where if either you or I are to survive the odds will be all in your favor—because of your familiarity with what, to me, would be unknown and perilous surroundings?"

Gerald smiled—a strange smile.

"Prince Nicholas the wary, I'll swear to you not knowingly to land in any unexplored or unpopulated portion of the earth's surface!" he cried.

Nikky inclined his head.

"Shall we cover each other from our pockets, or parade our guns before the women, while we get ready?" he asked.

"From our pockets, by all means. And you'll be glad of one thing: it's very easy to talk in my plane, as I have it rigged up. We can keep up appearances, or nearly so, while starting; and afterward we can enjoy each other's society." He smiled, again, rather strangely. "There will be things I shall want to say to you."

"You will—perhaps—awaken my moral sense?" the suggestion was suave.

"I will—perhaps—awaken your intelligence."

"My God!—an educational tour!"

"God grant—an educational tour."

SIDNEY and her mother accepted in silent surprize the decision of the two men. That Nikky and Gerald should agree peaceably upon any procedure, and should call them from their rooms at two o'clock in the morning to make ready for a flight, was so strange that Sidney cared to hear no explanation. It would probably not be the right one if Nikky were a party to it, and she had no opportunity for speech alone with Gerald. Mrs. Montrose comforted herself with a hope that Nikky was managing to dictate terms to Gerald, even though the trip would be made in Gerald's plane; she had confidence in Nikky's agility in plot and counter-plot. It was apparent to Sidney, however, in one final moment before they entered the plane, that Gerald was at least partly in command of affairs—for he handed her his revolver with a few swift-spoken words:

"If the prince shoots me—before we clear the ground. And watch him—every move!"

Sidney nodded. She was white to the lips, and yet elated. Gerald had a plan. He hadn't given her up. He wouldn't give her up. He had hopes of forcing Nikky to a complete submission which her mother would not be able to break down by playing on Sidney's pity for her. And she, who had been Nikky's wife and Gerald's wife—the deep flush that is signal of nothing in the world but burning humiliation chased away her pallor—she knew well that Gerald had a fair chance of success. There was an innate softness in Nikky, an innate manly strength in Gerald. Given anything like an even break, Nikky would have to give way. But there was danger enough in Gerald's plan—she knew that, too.

Handing her the revolver was not an idle gesture—Gerald was not given to idle gestures. He meant her to use it, if necessary. That was why she had gone white to the lips in the moment of taking it—but she *would* use it, if she saw the need. She would do anything in the world to save Gerald, and Gerald would not have brought that gun unless—unless he suspected that Nikky would do anything in the world to get rid of him.

Sidney trembled at that, remembering again, and in a new light, her own unhappy relation with Nikky. Wife to a man who might be suspected of cold-blooded murder! It hadn't occurred to her that Nikky might be *that* sort—but now that the idea had been suggested to her, she believed he was. Forgetting for once her lifelong generosity for her mother, and knowing that Gerald would joyfully share any fate with her, Sidney prayed that the plane might crash—rather than that she might be handed over again to Nikky, whom now she feared as well as hated.

And as the two men helped her climb into the cockpit, she stole a newly curious look at Gerald's face. No! For a moment she had even wondered if this were a suicide flight; if, in some deep sureness that he was saving her from something worse than death, Gerald might intend this flight to end in death for the four of them. After that one searching glance, though, she knew better than that. Gerald's eye was clear, his firm jaw set; his mind was intent on danger—deadly danger, of some rather extreme sort, she would say at a guess; but it was not set on any hopeless, desperate thing like the thing she had contemplated. There was a light in his eye that told Sidney he still hoped for happiness: his own, and hers.

Nikky wasn't happy, and that, too,

was reassuring; since good fortune for him must be her undoing, and vice versa. She sensed a warm breath of hope, though she had said good-bye to hope; so Nikky was afraid—of something. The suavity had left his voice when he spoke now, in a tone that was nearly a whine.

"I say, Lamont, intrepid explorer and brilliant scientist—Lord, what a combination for one man! If only you were a prima donna, too, now, you'd be everything, Lamont!" The swagger didn't deceive Sidney; Nikky was frightened, though he was used enough to planes and a good flyer himself. "Lamont, how about temperatures? You're more warmly dressed than the rest of us. Aviator togs are warm, but we're in lighter weight winter clothing. It's cold down here; it will be colder up above. Have you anything you can fit us out with?"

Gerald smiled. He, too, knew that Nikky was rotten with nerves—knew it better than Sidney, who wasn't aware that Nikky was definitely already by plan and intent a murderer whose crime had been inconveniently found out by the man with whom he was to fly, and who should by now have been his victim.

"You won't be cold, Nikky." Gerald's tone was polite, though again he made the *petit nom* sound like a contemptuous sobriquet for a cur. "I told you this would be an educational trip. To start with, I'll introduce you to an invention of mine that you'll be thankful for—a new type of heating for air travel. Now that I've come back to life, I fancy it will make me rich and famous; I only postponed introducing it till after that last trip of mine. I wanted to give it a thorough tryout—but I've already assured myself that it will work. You'll be as comfortable on tonight's ride as though you were sitting before the fireplace in the lodge. In fact, we wouldn't need our wraps at all—but as we have them on, I'll make the temperature suitable. I'm all for getting started. If you'll help in Mrs. Montrose, and then get in yourself — after we're all in, I'll explain how it works."

Nikky still hung back. He looked suspiciously at the inside of the plane.

"No individual currents to attach to our clothing—not *that* sort of thing?" he asked in sudden, quick suspicion.

Gerald laughed.

"Positively not. I'm not going to electrocute you, Nikky, though some day someone may. What a mind you have! You might as well accuse me of planning to treat the rest of us to a warming current of juice, and freeze you by leaving it off you—refrigerate you to death, so to speak!"

Nikky's swarthy face flushed with a dark anger.

"Get in, man!" Gerald finished in an even tone. "One thing I'll promise you—this flight is share and share alike, so far as I have anything to do with it. If you jump out, I won't stop you—but we'll take the air together, and we'll land together—we'll breathe the same air and be warmed by the same heating plant—oh, get in!"

Sullenly, Nikky obeyed his first instructions—helping Mrs. Montrose in, then following her. For the first time it was dawning on Mrs. Montrose that her favorite was definitely unhappy over this queer business. As Gerald started the plane, she spoke to him in the tender tone a mother would use to a favored son—her usual tone to him:

"Nikky—you want us to go?—you said——"

And Nikky answered hastily, yet not forgetting the manner that had won and held her championship:

"Yes—yes—it's the best thing. A flight—to clear the air—to give us time to think! If I weren't sure it would be best for all of us—especially for *you*,

Mother—I wouldn't have asked it of you. It's all right. No finer flyer than Lamont, after all; and—I'll look after you."

GERALD made contact, leaped in, taxied the plane. His ability to do all this without help was facilitated, Nikky knew, by other little inventions of his—things he kept quiet about until they were in a high state of perfection, but which in the meantime made him a wizard in the ordinary handling of his own plane. Nikky even relaxed a little. It was true that there was no safer way of making a flight than behind Gerald Lamont. And he, like Sidney, was sure that Gerald intended no suicide flight. After all, the advantage lay with Nikky, and only a cowardice that he admitted freely enough to himself had prevented him from seeing it. Gerald would give them a safe trip, while he tried to think up some way of convincing Mrs. Montrose of Nikky's guilt. And that wouldn't be easy to do. And unless Mrs. Montrose was convinced, Sidney would have to stick with Nikky—under pain of risking her mother's life by crossing her wishes. But while Gerald was futilely going over the situation in his own mind, Nikky would be thinking too—and he had a great advantage in that he carried no unnecessary cargo of scruples. When they finally landed—eventually they would have to land—he wouldn't waste time. There'd be a moment when Sidney wasn't watching—Nikky's mouth grew more feline, more cruel. Yes, that was it! When they were landing, at the end of the flight—just as soon as it wasn't too dangerous—in that moment when an unpiloted plane would probably not mean death to all of them—he'd catch Sidney off guard and shoot Lamont. Then he'd overpower Sidney before she knew what had happened—and he'd swear the accident came before the shot and that his gun went off. Sidney wouldn't believe it. Mrs. Montrose would—she'd believe anything Nikky told her. Sidney would hate him. She'd fear him. But she'd go right on sticking to him, for exactly the same reason that had held her so long: her mother.

Where Sidney's mother was concerned, her capacity for martyrdom amounted to moral cowardice. She'd never dare do a thing that might bring that old woman's selfish life to a period—no, never. And Nikky'd have a beautiful wife in a position that amounted to slavery. He licked his lips. There was a definite sadistic streak in Nikky. The plane was climbing. Nikky was sitting between Sidney and her mother, behind Gerald. That would help him in the end—after he had shot Lamont. He'd make Mrs. Montrose sure he hadn't moved a finger until after the not-too-serious accident occurred. He sat quietly, now, studying the back of Gerald's head. Firm and purposeful, somehow a little grim, that head looked. But after this ride it would never look that way again. It would be shattered by a near-at-hand shot—oozing blood, and brains. Gerald was taking them for a ride—but in the Chicago phrase it was he, Nikky, who was taking Gerald for a ride. Nikky smiled softly to himself. Then Gerald spoke.

"Comfortable? My cabin is specially constructed, as you see. Noise cut off, very largely. Easy to talk. Warm enough. Or *are* you warm enough back there? Like more heat, or less? Anybody thirsty? You'll find a thermos—turn the little brass knob to the right. I always carry nutrition tablets in there, besides—when anybody gets hungry or thirsty, I hope you'll help yourselves. Don't wait to be asked."

The plane was climbing. Suddenly a queer sensation gripped Nikky — some-

thing like that he had felt on his very first flight a dozen years ago. He felt as though he were stepping out abruptly into space. For a moment he fought for self-control.

"Lamont—your specially arranged layout is giving me the jim-jams. You were going to tell us—how you're keeping us warm. We—we're high—very high. We—we ought to be freezing. And as you said—no noise, to speak of——"

For a fleeting instant Gerald half turned his head toward his passengers.

"A trifle, that. I've cut off heat-radiant communication between an enclosed space here and the surrounding air. Light waves are deflectable, you know. Well, also heat waves. The same principle accounts for the absence of the violent roar you associate with airplane travel. To my mind, that utterly nullified the pleasure of the upper spaces. Like caging Pegasus in a boiler factory. This is different."

To Sidney came the thought: "This is record-breaking. When Gerald is ready to give all this to the world, he'll be a wonderfully great man." But she didn't speak. She was sharing Nikky's sensations, a little. Of course she had flown before, and more than once. But just now she had an appalling sense of the falling away of the earth. . . .

She looked out and down—at an angle that should, she thought, have given her a bird's-eye view of the distant ground. But it didn't. It gave her, instead, a thrillingly clear view of the night sky—night sky where she had expected to find Mother Earth. Somehow timidly, yet experimentally, she tried again. And still, she only saw—the empty, star-strewn sky. She looked at her mother, and saw that she was very pale. She looked at Nikky, and saw him licking his lips—not cruelly, now, as sometimes Nikky licked his lips, but in a different manner—like a dog she had once seen frightened half to death, so frightened that he was made sick by it.

And then she called to Gerald.

"Jerry! Is anything—wrong? Am I dizzy, or dreaming, or are we flying upside down or something? I feel—queer. And I can't find—can't find—*what direction is down?*"

She saw the swift motion of Gerald's arms, as he did something to the plane. She had the impression that he was lashing the stick to a course—as, on a boat, the helm can be lashed. And that was it, evidently, for he turned about in his seat till he was facing his three passengers.

"O. K., Sidney, dear?" he asked. As their eyes met she felt her nervousness subside, and nodded. "Take things quietly, Mrs. Montrose. I'm about to give you all a fuller explanation of this trip than you have had. The explanation is due you—perhaps I had no right to withhold it so long. But the situation is unusual. You, Nikky, keep quiet and listen. The first part of my story you know well enough."

BRACED by the steady assurance of his manner, the other three were more at ease, the queer air-dizziness less in evidence, as seasickness may be forgotten for a while under a strong counter stimulus. And when he said casually, "I wouldn't look down at all for a while, if I were you—not till you've heard my explanation," his hearers obeyed him quite literally, simply recognizing that they were flying higher than any of them had been accustomed to go, and still on the climb. They knew, so well, that Gerald knew the power and reliability of his own plane.

Quickly, Gerald recounted the early events of the night: his having noticed a peculiarity in the large, untucked-in undersheet of his bed; the stout cord run

through the wide hem, with ends hanging out on the side toward the door. "I was expected to show myself—well, after all, perhaps no more unobservant than I might have been on another occasion. How often do you even look at the sides of the bed you're lying down to sleep in? The old death traps with the smoldering canopies that are history might have looked a bit peculiar if the victims had noticed," he ended that part of his story; then told even more briefly of the finding of the note that was to have been produced as his own suicide note. And when he finished:

"I have a very important question to ask of two of you," he said. "You Sidney—first. The note was typed—on my machine, the same machine that is in this plane right now. There's nothing to prove that Nikky typed it. There's nothing, I suppose, to prove that he made or had made that sheet—and that he intended—what he did intend. Sidney—do you believe that Nikky planned my death tonight?"

Sidney was trembling as with excessive cold. The bitter brilliance of the stars which she could see without turning her head were like ice daggers stabbing at her soul. That deadly air-dizziness was back again—those stars, oh, she felt as though she were falling toward them, falling upon them! And then the desperate, human reality of the situation and of Gerald's appeal laid hold on her, and she knew that she was suffering from that more than from any physical cause—that for one instant she had skirted a wild hysteria, almost madness. After all—she had been the wife of this man beside her, who was a murderer! Had been—if Nikky and her mother could compel her, she still was—would be. But *now*, surely, her mother——

Gerald was speaking again. She must have answered him, though she didn't remember it.

"Thanks, Sidney. You believe me. And, Mrs. Montrose—do you?"

Sidney could see the impenetrable obstinacy settle on her mother's face like a fog.

"Do I—believe *that* pack of lies—that invention of yours, to break up my daughter's present marriage? No, Gerald Lamont, *I do not!* And now I know you'll never go away and leave people to believe you died when everybody thought you did. I know you'll stay—publish your discoveries—be rich—famous—but I don't care! I know something else, too. I know you have no respect in your heart for me—for my daughter's own mother—no respect!"

She was sobbing, and Sidney shuddered violently again. They were to have a spasm, an attack away up here where already things seemed to have assumed newer proportions of terror. . . .

Her mother went on. "You have no respect for me, so you can have none for my daughter." It was a pitiful attempt to dignify her utter selfishness. "I'll make you leave us alone, though. Sidney shall have a quiet divorce—she shall make you give it to her. If she doesn't, if things don't settle down again—with Sidney the wife of Prince Nicholas—oh, I was so happy before you came back, Gerald Lamont—happier than in all my life before—my daughter the wife of a prince—oh!——"

"Deadlock!" Gerald remarked, very grimly—for the second time that night. Then: "Take care of her, Sidney dear. She has really fainted for once, I think. I will talk to you and to Nikky, while you make her comfortable."

But in a moment it was necessary for Gerald to comfort Sidney. Deep in forgotten babyhood were the roots of her unreasoning love for this unwise woman

who took such unfair advantage of her. There are women born, perhaps, to be the mothers of small children; their children who are grown are like strangers to them. Gerald understood, if he had not before, how unchangeable was Sidney's devotion. There had been a mother who was young and lovely, once—and the loyalty that was Sidney's now was only the love that woman's baby had given her long ago. Not until Gerald had shown Sidney how steady were her mother's weakened pulse and faint breathing, could she listen to him. Then:

"Strap yourselves to your places!" Gerald said abruptly, knowing that Sidney would be better now for almost any distraction. And when Sidney and Nikky had obeyed him, he made his one dramatic gesture—an outward, downward sweep of the hand. No word was needed. Leaning as far out-board as their straps permitted, Sidney and Nikky—*looked*.

And as the man and woman he faced looked out and down, Gerald looked at them, reading in their faces the awfulness of the experience they were living through, seeing, behind mortal terror, the soul of a woman and of a man; back of the white anguish in Sidney's face, a calmness of trust that was not all trust in Gerald—that was, surely, no less a thing than trust in God; back of the deathly rigor that had pinched Nikky's features, the half-mad desperation of a trapped rat.

Then he, too, looked where the others were looking—seeing with them the thing they saw.

Below the plane was—nothing. Nothing—but the cold abyss of black that held the fixed stars and their planets. But *behind* them a mighty disk filled the empty sky, blotting from the dizzy eyes of the three who gazed the eternal loneliness of space.

For an instant it seemed that Nikky was on the verge of a violent seizure. Flecks of foam seemed to stand upon the white line of his lips. He tried to speak, and found no sound; again—and his voice issued in a thin croaking.

"What—have you done to us, Lamont? For God's sake! Have you—have you—hypnotized us?" A desperate quiver of hope died at the mute response in Gerald's eyes. "If this is real—and, oh, God, it is!—oh, but how can it be? This can't happen! We're riding in an ordinary plane—out here in space. Riding out here to a horrible death—not suffering yet—not cold—breathing, as though we breathed air——" Nikky choked and gasped, thinking of that dreadful vacuum in which the worlds were hung, and a brief shadow of pity crossed Gerald's face.

"Sit down!" he said in a curt tone that held, somehow, reassurance. "Your raving will terrify Sidney. Do you think I'm flying this plane to certain death—with Sidney in it? If you can control yourself and listen for a few moments, I'll make this thing that is happening clearer to you—more natural—not quite so desperately terrifying. The 'educational tour' will begin."

NIKKY shuddered, but he sat down. He shuddered partly at a ghastly memory of his sneer at the beginning of this flight. He had expected some kind of a prosy argument—maybe a little bragging about Gerald's new inventions. That was only a while ago—how long? It was an eternity ago, because it belonged to the earth and to life; and this time that was now belonged to doom and unearthly horror and death. And yet he listened.

"Sidney, you always were interested in the things men knew—and didn't know—about this universe we live in. Whether we win back safe or whether something beyond my planning gives this voyage an end I haven't meant, you'll be interested.

"That device that surprized you at first, by which I insulated us from surrounding cold and from the racket of our motor, I won't waste much time on. It's a revolutionary thing; it depends on the diversion of heat waves and of sound waves, without interfering with the waves of light, and so I have had to establish invisible walls of both air and ether about my fuselage; but it's a thing that is small enough, compared with the other principles upon which this flight depends.

"First, then, I'll speak of the thing that almost made Nikky's lungs refuse their office: the question of breathing, out here in space.

"That question is closely linked with another one: the question of friction. Nikky might also have marveled at the fact that we aren't already destroyed by friction—that we haven't long ago fallen flaming back to earth as our speed increased to put us—where we are.

"So many things are simple—simple, when once they are found out, or rather realized. Yes, as simple as Newton's falling apple.

"I have my own motor; and I burn a fuel that as yet is unknown to others. I can, then, achieve speeds that would ordinarily be regarded as tremendous.

"When we began this flight, I climbed more and more steeply—in other words, by degrees I directed my flight to a point *away from the earth.* I flew upward—or outward—as rapidly as I dared, in consideration of the density of the atmosphere. As we went higher, I increased my speed. Now the earth's atmosphere, like all atmospheres and all gases, is, of course, fluid at ordinary temperatures—or, for practical purposes I will say that it is fluid. And as our plane rushed upward it created an air current, and exerted a certain attraction for the particles of air through which it flew. As the atmosphere rarefied, the plane's velocity increased, and this attraction increased proportionately. We are now in the thin outer stratum of the earth's atmosphere; but the air we breathe is real air, and of practically the density to which we are accustomed. Our flying plane is the nucleus, now, of a ball of the earth's atmosphere which has become detached and travels with us, through space. We are, in effect, ourselves a heavenly body; carrying our atmosphere with us, as in the case of other heavenly bodies.

"That is the gist of the matter, quite accurately stated; though, in a partial doubt of the practical working out of my theoretical predictions, I have slightly aided and ensured the outcome of the experiment by the utilization of an air-condenser attached under the plane, which perhaps could have been entirely dispensed with.

"I said that we are passing beyond the outer stratum of earth's atmosphere; the air outside our flying air ball is, accordingly, extremely thin and utterly unbreathable; also, our flight is not so rapid as it will shortly become. We are already at such a height that the fractional obstruction of the air is fairly negligible; however, without any change of speed from the motor, we shall greatly increase our speed as our impetus plus the greatest speed attained by the motor in heavier air down below, carries us beyond the last impeding barriers. In outer space, into which we are about to plunge, we will perhaps approximate the speed of light. And I expect to test out one at least of Einstein's interesting theories."

Sidney murmured: "Einstein! Didn't —didn't he prove, somehow, that space —curved, was that it?—that there was a limit to space itself?"

Gerald's eyes caressed the girl for the gift of her comradeship.

"Something very like that, dear; but I will promise you that we won't find the

limits of space tonight—that I don't expect to find them living. No. It's a lesser thing—but a very strange thing I'm thinking of now—that I may shortly show you. Some day—if we live, together—there are so many things that we may see together! It's like a dream of heaven to think of the glorious living there could be for us—for you and me—if—if things should turn out our way.

"We're gaining rapidly in velocity, and in a little while I'll explain—and you'll see—the thing I spoke of. And in the meantime, I'll explain to you, Sidney—and to you, Nikky—this thing that I'm doing; this awful chance I am taking with a life far dearer to me than my own, because—because I can't let the woman I love, and who is my wife, sacrifice herself as Sidney must, if she is to go on being the Sidney I love. I can't leave you to the life that would be yours, Sidney—as the wife of a murderous thug from somewhere, like Prince Nikky!

"My plan—I'm ashamed to call it that, it is so simple—was only this. We were, as I've called it, at a hopeless deadlock. I saw no means on earth of forcing Nikky to give in. He's waiting now, for a chance to do me in; but you, Sidney, have my gun—and he hasn't had the chance. Whenever we land, in one way or another, he'll get it, I suppose. And so——

"I dared greatly. Hurled the four of us, with our miserable, petty problem, away from the world that offered no solution. Entrusted our destiny, maybe—to God. Out here—something may happen. I don't know what. I don't know what I hope for. Nikky might go yellow enough to promise anything I wanted—but he'd murder me the moment I turned my back when I landed us, just the same—unless I got him, and I can't do that. And yet—I do hope.

"There isn't anything out here in the vast chasm into which we're plunging. Except for ourselves, I suppose there isn't any life at all. But there is—God. Yes, I suppose I've dared entrust our destiny to Him.

"I'm going on, Sidney, dear. How far—God knows. If there comes a moment, a time, when it is safe to take you back, I'll know it and I'll swing around. Unless I feel that such a miracle has happened, that such a moment has come—I'd rather go on forever, Sidney, until we plunge forever on unknowing—a comet with four sleepers resting eternally in the little shell of metal that was their last home. We *can* go on, for quite a while. There's stuff to eat—compressed tablets; there's a condenser to get some water out of our little atmosphere. And—well—I won't take you back, Sidney, to the hell I've saved you from. Sidney?"

The word was a question. The girl's eyes answered. Nikky stared at the two of them like a man in a nightmare. They'd face death in a flying tomb together, and not care. But Nikky?

Agony beaded the moisture on his forehead till it ran down into his staring eyes. And yet he offered no promises. He knew what they would be worth; and, the thing that mattered, he knew that Gerald knew.

A new tenseness in the lines of Gerald's mouth plunged Nikky deeper into his abyss of terror. He sensed, somehow, a terrific increase in speed. Gerald had said, hadn't he, that shortly there would be an acceleration? A slight acceleration he had seemed to anticipate. Nikky was sure that the plane was leaping, lurching forward now, at a rate that dwarfed their velocity of a moment ago. He stared at his fellow passengers, trying to read their faces. But there was a blurriness before his eyes—or rather a shuttle-like effect of light and darkness, as though he were looking through the spokes of a wheel, rapidly revolving. He met Gerald's eyes

fairly, and was reassured. Between the two of them vision seemed clearer. Gerald was facing him, was studying as Nikky had studied, the faces of the three who companioned him where no living being had ever been before.

Once more Nikky looked, peeringly, at the other two. Mrs. Montrose had not recovered consciousness. She lay back, slumped helplessly as a sack of grain. It had occurred to all of them, without need of words, that it would be merciful to leave her for a while as she was. Sidney's face was calm, though a little chiseled-looking, perhaps a little set. But there was the flickering uncertainty again, that made her—almost—hard to see clearly. Nikky rubbed his eyes and looked again—and uttered a mad scream of terror.

"Lamont—Lamont—ah, look!——"

As GERALD turned his head and moved slightly, it seemed to Nikky that he was not a man of flesh and blood, but a fluid silhouette—a shadow—a reflection that existed only in two dimensions. But on his face there was the rapt look of exaltation that sets the seeker after truth beyond and apart from the prison of the purely personal. And when he spoke, it was to neither of the two who heard him, but his words were only uttered thoughts:

"The speed approaching light—Einstein's theory of the relation between speed and dimension: at the more tremendous speeds, matter becomes compressed in the direction in which it travels, leaving us all in our familiar dimensions, so long as we are regarded in a right angle direction to the direction of forward movement—*diminishing our size in a backward and forward direction so tremendously that it approaches negation.* We are approximating in appearance beings living in a plane surface, or rather in plane surfaces, but rushing in a direction at right angles to the plane."

Becoming conscious of Sidney and Nikky again, he said quickly: "Never mind that. Don't go insane with terror, either of you. This is all quite natural—all part of Einstein's theorization. Another time I'll explain, if I can—to *you,* Sidney! Sometime I must know for myself the working out of more of it—do some of the great experiments—experiments of Michelson and Morley——"

He stopped again, suddenly. He was staring into the eternal night that surrounded them. Nikky followed that gaze—and Sidney. In that instant, the three seemed to be parts of one entity—because they were sharing an experience that transcended all human emotion. They were *seeing.*

Out there in the emptiness, floating, as it seemed, between them and the stars that seemed to march with their headlong flight, so distant were they still, something seemed to move beside them—something of vaguely human shape that yet defied exact perception, because of its tenuosity. Like a great shape formed of thin vapor it was, and the stars shone through it—and yet—it was there.

Speaking afterward of that moment of strange companionship, Sidney and Gerald said that they shared a feeling of reassurance—of trust and peace and great confidence that somehow everything was well with them—everything would continue to be well.

But the effect upon Nikky was the reverse.

He had been fighting down a rising tide of terror that bordered on madness. Now the tide rose and engulfed his reason. Supposing he killed Lamont—now—wresting the gun from Sidney's heedless hand—he would not have to look longer then, at the thinly vaporous form of that *something* out there. To kill Lamont would be to end life for all of them: for Sidney; for himself. It didn't matter.

He would no longer be tortured. His brain was bursting; it must find relief.

He threw himself upon Sidney. The gun was in his hand. He leaned a little forward. He could kill at his leisure—but he would not wait. This next moment should be the moment of Lamont's death, though his own certain death would follow, since the manipulation of this space-faring plane was utterly unknown to him.

He leaned forward, staring at Gerald; glaring—with the eyes of a murderer, of a madman.

And then he threw the gun from him—out of the plane—out into the abyss. And still leaned forward—staring—with the eyes of a fiend-killer brought to judgment, gone quite mad with terror.

So fixedly he stared that Sidney's eyes followed his; that Gerald turned his back upon him and looked forward too. Neither of them heeded the strangling, brutish cry that passed Nikky's lips.

Ahead of them floated in space—a face. Something let loose from Dante's hell, it might have been. A fury, living out an eternity of damnation. An Elemental, old as the Ancient of Days, evil as the undying enemy of mankind.

It seemed to fill all space ahead of them—going ahead of them—waiting for them to plunge headlong into it.

It vanished, as there came a groan from Nikky—a sob—silence.

When Gerald and Sidney turned to Nikky, he had fallen forward in an utter collapse. When they lifted him, they saw that he was dead.

SIDNEY herself was near to swooning. As in a dream, she was conscious that Gerald was moving rapidly, eagerly. His hand touched a lever in the side of the plane. At the same time he signaled her again to look forward. And, looking, she saw that where a moment ago the hideous vision had been, the sky again was clear; but one of the glowing spheres that thronged the heavens was nearer to them than the others—was rushing toward them, glowing more effulgently, swelling rapidly to the size of a baseball; and then, as the plane swung slightly in its course, it drew away to one side and came no nearer.

"That is Neptune!" Gerald said in a half whisper. "Thank God, we haven't passed the outer sentinel of the solar system—and already I dare return to earth—because he's dead—he'll not break your heart and ruin your life, or trouble you ever again, dear girl! Neptune! Another time, I'll tell you more. But now, just this. I set my course to pass fairly near to the outermost planet of our system, hoping against hope that by the time we reached this point we might turn—home. We are, then, affected by the gravimetric pull of Neptune, and are describing a hyperbolic course, similar to that described in Jules Verne's *Trip to the Moon*. It will deflect our direction of travel until the sun is no longer directly behind us, as was the case when we flew straight away from the earth, and in its shadow; and by manipulating with this lever a heavy weight which has been centered in the total mass of the plane, I can utilize the faint pull of gravity to catch the sun's rays more or less directly upon the surface of this plane—one side of which is painted with a reflecting, and the other with an absorbing, mixture of paint. Ah!"

Long ago they must have left the shadow of the earth, but Sidney had not recently looked backward. Now, watching all that Gerald did, and following his gaze as before, she saw the sun—behind them—no!—already a little to one side, and now drawing around until they were shooting toward it and leaving the shining disk of Neptune to fall away into the blackness where still the far stars seemed set in immobility.

"I have turned the plane by using the impact of light to deflect it from its hyperbolic path," Gerald explained. "Same principle as the Crooke's radiometer—you've seen that in college, Sidney, dear. The light rays drove away one side of the plane and were absorbed by the other—it was like a fine bit of tacking in bringing round a sailing vessel against the wind. Now gravity, plus our original impetus, will draw us toward the sun. And since we have been traveling at a terrific speed, the earth is still in our way—and no other planets are in conjunction. The air ball which is our atmosphere will soften the impact as we arrive within the outer limits of earth's atmosphere; and I know how to use my atmosphere condenser to further assure our safe landing. Also I can break our flight by describing a second hyperbolic flight using the earth as the focus of the path, and again tacking to the impact of the rays of sunlight.

"Our safe landing! Sidney! You and I are to know life together, after all—and to know many things together. To take other flights—to learn the secrets of the universe. . . ."

Not until that night's wonder and terror were things of history to Gerald and Sidney did they speak again of the horror that had terrified Nikky out of his life and into the unknown. And then one evening Sidney spoke of it.

"I thank God, Gerald, that Mother was unconscious. She would have died too, and I love her. That awful face—awful, yet somehow familiar! Gerald, what could it have been?"

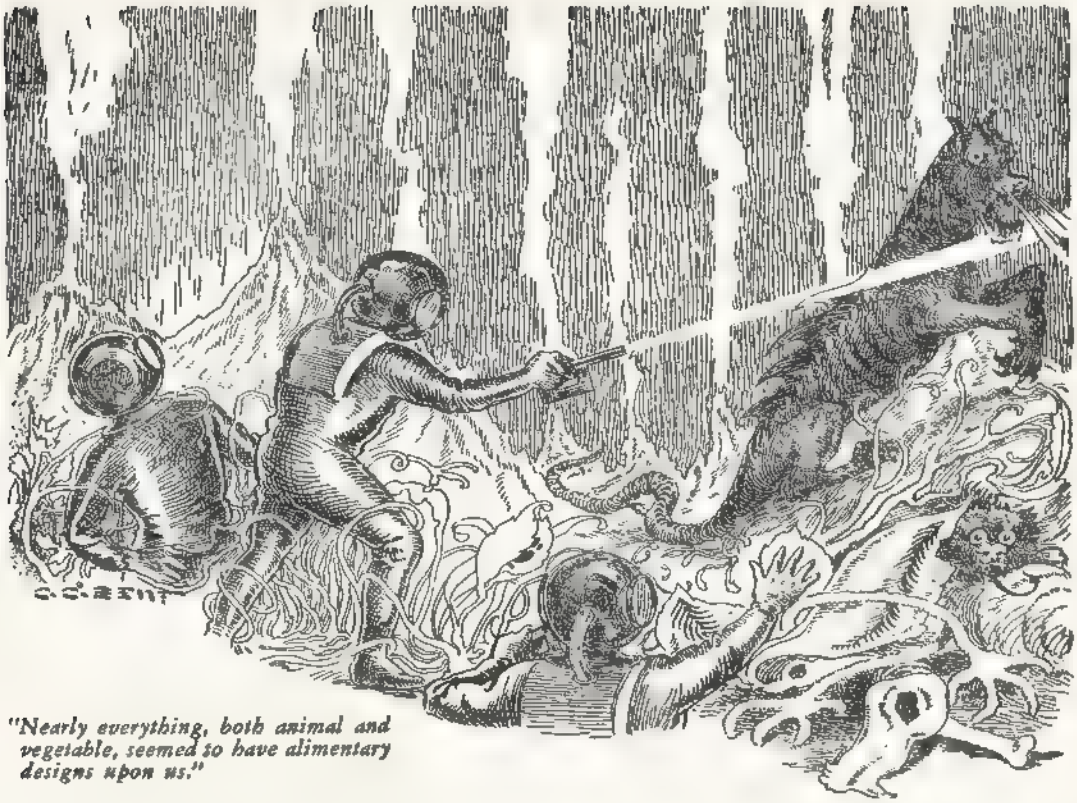
"Did you notice," Gerald said, musingly, "that the face had—*Nikky's features?* It did. I think, dear, that it was a trick of our vision, or rather a trick of reflection. We were traveling so fast that the light rays reached us irregularly, almost as though we were partly losing them by slipping between them. That caused the shuttle-like weaving of light and shadow that was so confusing, as we looked at each other by the artificial light within the plane. Well, what we saw was, I think, just such a reflection as one sees on the surface of a pool of water—but the surface on which it was cast was the outer surface of our surrounding envelope of air; and at the velocity at which we were going, we seemed to be overtaking it, or hurling ourselves upon it, in a peculiar way. It was a huge, distorted image of Nikky's own face, made fiendish by his murderous intent, that frightened him to death!"

For a long time the two sat silent before the fire in the cozy, shadowed room where they were sitting. And then Sidney spoke once more:

"And—that other shape that seemed to move beside us—thinner than air, yet real? The Thing that seemed to reassure us, and to goad Nikky to madness. Gerald, what was that?"

Gerald leaned forward so that the light of the flickering flames played upon his face. His eyes were eager—the eyes of the seeker after truth.

"Perhaps there are—Beings—no one has guessed at or imagined, out there in space!" he said. "Some day, my own—another flight—together——"



"Nearly everything, both animal and vegetable, seemed to have alimentary designs upon us."

The Immeasurable Horror

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

The seas of Venus spawned an incredible monster that attacked the exploring party from Earth

I DO not mean to boast when I say that cowardice has never been among my failings. It would be needless to boast, in view of my honorable record as an ether-ace in six interplanetary expeditions. But I tell you that I would not return to Venus for any consideration—not for all the platinum and radium in its mountainsides, nor all the medicinal saps and pollens and vegetable ambergris of its forests. There will always be men to imperil their lives and their sanity in the Venusian trading-posts, and fools who will still try to circumnavigate a world of unearthly dangers. But I have done my share, and I know that Venus was not designed for human nerves or human brains. The loathsome multiform fecundity of its overheated jungles ought to be enough for any one—not to mention the way in which so many posts with their buildings of neo-manganese steel have been wholly blotted out between the departure of one space-freighter and the arrival of the next. No, Venus was not meant for man. If you still doubt me, listen to my story.

I was with the first Venusian expedition, under the leadership of Admiral Carfax, in 1977. We were able to make

no more than a mere landing, and were then compelled to return earthward because of our shortage of oxygen, due to a serious miscalculation regarding our needs. It was unsafe, we found, to breathe the thick, vapor-laden air of Venus for more than short intervals; and we couldn't afford to make an overdraft on our tanks. In 1979 we went back, more fully equipped for all contingencies this time, and landed on a high plateau near the equator. This plateau, being comparatively free from the noxious flora and fauna of the abysmal steaming jungles, was to form the base of our explorations.

I felt signally honored when Admiral Carfax put me in charge of the planetary coaster whose various parts had been brought forth from the bowels of the huge ether-ship and fitted together for local use. I, Richard Harmon, was only an engineer, a third assistant pilot of the space-vessel, with no claim whatever to scientific renown; and the four men entrusted to my guidance were all experts of international fame. They were John Ashley, botanist, Aristide Rocher, geologist, Robert Manville, biologist and zoologist, and Hugo Markheim, head of the Interplanetary Survey. Carfax and the remaining sixteen of our party were to stay with the ether-ship till we returned and made our report. We were to follow the equator, landing often for close observations, and make, if feasible, a complete circuit of the planet. In our absence, a second coaster was to be fitted together, in preparation for a longitudinal voyage around the poles.

The coaster was of that type which is now commonly used for flying at all levels within the terrestrial atmosphere. It was made of neonin-tempered aluminum, it was roomy and comfortable, with ports of synthetic crystal tougher than steel, and could be hermetically closed. There were the usual engines run by explosive atomic power, and a supplementary set of the old electro-solar turbines in case of emergency. The vessel was fitted with heating and refrigerating systems, and was armed with electronic machine-guns having a forty-mile range; and we carried for hand-weapons a plentiful supply of infra-red grenades, of heat-tubes and zero tubes, not knowing what hostile forms of life we might encounter. These weapons were the deadliest ever devised by man; and a child could have wiped out whole armies with them. But I could smile now at their inadequacy. . . .

The plateau on which we had landed was far up in a range which we named the Purple Mountains because they were covered from base to summit with enormous two-foot lichens of a rich Tyrian hue. There were similarly covered areas in the plateau, where the soil was too thin for the sustenance of more elaborate plant forms. Here, among the multitudinous geysers, and the horned, fantastic peaks that were intermittently visible through a steam-charged atmosphere, we had established ourselves in a lichen-field. Even here we had to wear our refrigerating suits and carry oxygen whenever we stepped out of the ether-ship; for otherwise the heat would have parboiled us in a few minutes, and the ultra-terrestrial gases in the air would have speedily overpowered us. It was a weird business, putting the coaster together under such circumstances. With our huge inflated suits and masks of green vitrolium, we must have looked like a crew of demons toiling in the fumes of Gehenna.

I shall never forget the hour when the five of us who had been chosen for that first voyage of discovery said good-bye to Admiral Carfax and the others and stepped into the coaster. Somehow, there

was a greater thrill about it than that which attended the beginning of our trip through sidereal space. The 23,000 miles of our proposed circuit would of course be a mere bagatelle: but what marvels and prodigies of unimagined life or landscape might we not find! If we had only known the truth! . . . but indeed it was fortunate that we could not know. . . .

Flying very slowly, as near to the ground as was practicable, we left the plateau and descended through a long jungle-invaded pass to the equatorial plains. Sometimes, even when we almost grazed the jungle-tops, we were caught in voluminous rolling masses of cloud; and sometimes there were spaces where we could see dimly ahead for a few miles, or could even discern the white-hot glaring of the dropsical sun that hung perpetually at zenith.

We could get only a vague idea of the vegetation beneath us. It was a blurred mass of bluish and whitish greens, of etiolated mauves and saffrons tinged with jade. But we could see that the growths were of unearthly height and density, and that many of them had the character of calamites and giant grasses rather than trees. For a long while we sought vainly an open space in which to alight and begin our investigations.

After we had flown on for an hour or two above the serried jungle, we crossed a great river that couldn't have been so very far below the boiling-point, to judge from the columns of steam that coiled upward from it. Here we could measure the height of the jungle, for the shores were lined with titanic reeds marked off in ten-yard segments, that rose for a hundred yards in air, and were overshadowed by the palm-ferns behind them. But even here there was no place for us to descend. We crossed other rivers, some of which would have made the Amazon look like a summer creek; and we must have gone on for another hour above that fuming everlasting forest ere we came to a clear spot of land.

We wondered about that clearing, even at first sight. It was a winding mile-wide swath in the jungle, whose end and beginning were both lost in the vapors. The purplish soil seemed to have been freshly cleared, and was clean and smooth as if a whole legion of steam-rollers had gone over it. We were immensely excited, thinking that it must be the work of intelligent beings—of whom, so far, we had found no slightest trace.

I brought the coaster gently down in the clearing, close to the jungle's edge; and donning our refrigerating suits and arming ourselves with heat-tubes, we unscrewed the seven-inch crystal of the manhole and emerged.

The curiosity we felt concerning that clearing was drowned in our wonder before the bordering forest. I doubt if I can give you any real idea of what it was like. The most exuberant tropical jungle on earth would have been a corn-patch in comparison. The sheer fertility of it was stupendous, terrifying, horrifying—everything was overgrown, overcrowded, with a fulsome rankness that pushed and swelled and mounted even as you watched it. Life was everywhere, seething, bursting, pullulating, rotting. I tell you, we could actually see it grow and decay, like a slow moving picture. And the variety of it was a botanist's nightmare. Ashley cursed like a longshoreman when he tried to classify some of the things we found. And Manville had his problems, too, for all sorts of novel insects and animals were flopping, crawling, crashing and flying through the monstrous woods.

I'm almost afraid to describe some of those plants. The overlooming palm ferns with their poddy fronds of un-

wholesome mauve were bad enough. But the smaller things that grew beneath them, or sprouted from their boles and joints! Half of them were unspeakably parasitic; and many were plainly sarcophagous. There were bell-shaped flowers the size of wine-barrels that dripped a paralyzing fluid on anything that passed beneath them; and the carcasses of flying lizards and strange legless mammals were rotting in a circle about each of them, with the tips of new flowers starting from the putrefaction in which they had been seeded. There were vegetable webs in which squirming things had been caught—webs that were like a tangle of green, hairy ropes. There were broad, low-lying masses of fungoid white and yellow, that yielded like a bog to suck in the unwary creatures that had trodden upon them. And there were orchids of madly grotesque types that rooted themselves only in the bodies of living animals; so that many of the fauna we saw were adorned with floral parasites.

Even though we were all armed with heat-tubes, we didn't care to go very far in those woods. New plants were shooting up all around us; and nearly everything, both animal and vegetable, seemed to have alimentary designs upon us. We had to turn our heat-tubes on the various tendrils and branches that coiled about us; and our suits were heavily dusted with the white pollen of carnivorous flowers—a pollen that was anesthetic to the helpless monsters on which it fell. Once a veritable behemoth with a dinosaur-like head and forelegs, loomed above us suddenly from the ferns it had trampled down, but fled with screams of deafening thunder when we leveled our heat-rays upon it till its armored hide began to sizzle. Long-legged serpents larger than anacondas were stalking about; and they were so vicious, and came in such increasing numbers, that we found it hard to discourage them. So we retreated toward the coaster.

When we came again to the clearing, where the soil had been perfectly bare a few minutes before, we saw that the tips of new trees and plants were already beginning to cover it. At their rate of growth, the coaster would have been lost to sight among them in an hour or two. We had almost forgotten the enigma of that clearing; but now the problem presented itself with renewed force.

"Harmon, that swath must have been made within the last hour!" exclaimed Manville to me as we climbed back into the vessel behind the others.

"If we follow it," I rejoined, "we'll soon find who, or what, is making it. Are you fellows game for a little side-trip?" I had closed the manhole and was now addressing all four of my companions.

There was no demur from any one, though the following of the swath would mean a diagonal divagation from our set course. All of us were tense with excitement and curiosity. No one could venture a surmise that seemed at all credible, concerning the agency that had left a mile-wide trail. And also we were undecided as to the direction of its progress.

I set the engines running, and with that familiar roar of disintegrating carbon atoms in the cylinders beneath us, we soared to the level of the fern-tops and I steered the coaster along the swath in the direction toward which its nose happened to be pointing. However, we soon found that we were on the wrong track; for the new growth below us became disproportionately taller and thicker, as the mighty jungle sought to refill the gap that had been cloven through its center. So I turned the coaster, and we went back in the opposite direction.

I don't believe we uttered half a dozen

words among us as we followed the swath, and saw the dwindling of the plant-tops below till that bare purplish soil reappeared. We had no idea what we would find; and we were now too excited even for conjecture. I will readily admit that I, for one, felt a little nervous: the things we had already seen in the forest, together with that formidable recent clearing which no earthly machinery could have made, were enough to unsettle the equilibrium of the human system. As I have said before, I am no coward; and I have faced a variety of ultra-terrene perils without flinching. But already I began to suspect that we were among things which no earth-being was ever meant to face or even imagine. The hideous fertility of that jungle had almost sickened me. What, then, could be the agency that had cleared the jungle away more cleanly than a harvester running through a grain-field?

I watched the vapor-laden scene ahead in the reflector beside me; and the others all had their faces glued to the crystalline ports. Nothing untoward could be seen as yet; but I began to notice a slight, unaccountable increase of our speed. I had not increased the power—we had been running slowly, at no more than one hundred and fifty miles per hour; and now we were gaining, as if we were borne in the sweep of some tremendous air-current or the pull of a magnetic force.

The vapors had closed in before us; now they eddied to each side, leaving the landscape visible for many miles. I think we all saw the Thing simultaneously; but no one spoke for a full thirty seconds. Then Manville muttered, very softly: "My God!"

In front, no more than a half-mile distant, the swath was filled from side to side with a moving mass of livid angle-worm pink that rose above the jungle-tops. It was like a sheer cliff before us as we flew toward it. We could see that it was moving away from us, was creeping onward through the forest. The mass gave the impression of a jelly-fish consistency. It rose and fell, expanding and contracting in a slow rhythmic manner, with a noticeable deepening of color at each contraction.

"Life!" murmured Manville. "Life, in an unknown form, on a scale that would not be possible in our world."

The coaster was now rushing toward the worm-colored mass at more than two hundred miles an hour. A moment more, and we would have plunged into that palpitating wall. I turned the wheel sharply, and we veered to the left and rose with an odd sluggishness above the jungle, where we could look down. That sluggishness worried me, after our former headlong speed. It was as if we were fighting some new gravitational force of an unexampled potency.

We all had a feeling of actual nausea as we gazed down. There were leagues and leagues of that living substance; and the farther end was lost in the fuming vapors. It was moving faster than a man could run, with that horribly regular expansion and contraction, as if it were breathing. There were no visible limbs or appendages, no organs of any distinguishable kind; but we knew that the thing was alive and aware.

"Fly closer," whispered Manville. Horror and scientific fascination contended in his voice.

I steered diagonally downward, and felt an increase of the strange pull against which we were fighting. I had to reverse the gears and turn on more power to prevent the vessel from plunging headlong. We hung above the pink mass at a hundred-yard elevation and watched it. It flowed beneath us like an unnatural river, in a flat, glistening tide.

"Voyez!" cried Rocher, who preferred to speak in his native tongue, though he knew English as well as any of us.

Two flying monsters, large as pterodactyls, were now circling above the mass not far below us. It seemed as if they, like the vessel, were struggling against a powerful downward attraction. Through the air-tight sound-valves we could hear the thunderous beating of their immense wings as they strove to rise and were drawn gradually toward the pink surface. As they neared it, the mass rose up in a mighty wave, and in the deep mouth-like hollow that formed at the wave's bottom a colorless fluid began to exude and collect in a pool. Then the wave curved over, caught the struggling monsters, and lapsed again to a level, slowly palpitating surface above its prey.

We waited a little; and I realized suddenly that the onward flowing of the mass had ceased. Except for that queer throbbing, it was now entirely quiescent. But somehow there was a deadly menace in its tranquillity, as if the thing were watching or meditating. Apparently it had no eyes, no ears, no sense-organs of any sort; but I began to get the idea that in some unknowable manner, through senses beyond our apprehension, it was aware of our presence and was considering us attentively.

Now, all at once, I saw that the mass was no longer quiescent. It had begun to rise toward us, very stealthily and gradually, in a pyramidal ridge; and at the ridge's foot, even as before, a clear, transparent pool was gathering.

The coaster wavered and threatened to fall. The magnetic pull, whatever it was, had grown stronger than ever. I turned on fresh power; we rose with a painful, dragging slowness, and the ridge below shot abruptly into a pillar that loomed beside us and toppled over toward the vessel.

Before it could reach us, Manville had seized the switch that operated one of the machine-guns, had aimed it at the pillar and released a stream of disintegrative bolts that caused the overhanging menace to vanish like a melting arm of cloud. Below us the pyramidal base of the truncated pillar writhed and shuddered convulsively, and sank back once more into a level surface. The coaster soared dizzily, as if freed from a retarding weight; and reaching what I thought would be a safe elevation, we flew along the rim of the mass in an effort to determine its extent. And as we flew, the thing began to glide along beneath us at its former rate of progression.

I don't know how many miles of it there were, winding on through that monstrous jungle like a glacier of angle-worm flesh. I tell you, the thing made me feel as if my solar plexus had gone wrong. It was all I could do to steer the coaster. There was neither head nor tail to that damnable mass, and nothing anywhere that we could identify as special organs; it was a weltering sea of life, of protoplasmic cells organized on a scale that staggered all the preconceptions of biology. Manville was nearly out of his senses with excitement; and the rest of us were so profoundly shocked and overwhelmed that we began to wonder if the thing were real, or were merely an hallucination of nerves disordered by novel and terrific planetary forces.

WELL, we came to the end of it at last, where the pink wave was eating its way through the jungle. Everything in its path was being crushed down and absorbed—the four-hundred-foot ferns, the giant grasses, the grotesque carnivorous plants and their victims, the flying, waddling, creeping and striding monsters of all types. And the thing made so little sound—there was a low

murmur like that of gently moving water, and the snap or swish of trees as they went down, but nothing more.

"I guess we might as well go on," observed Manville regretfully. "I'd like to analyze a section of that stuff; but we've seen what it can do; and I can't ask you to take any chances with the coaster."

"No," I agreed, "there's nothing to be done about it. So, if you gentlemen are all willing, we might as well resume our course."

I set the vessel back toward the equator, at a goodly speed.

"Christ! that stuff is following us!" cried Manville a minute later. He had been watching from a rear port.

Intent on steering forthrightly, it had not occurred to me to keep an eye on the thing. Now I looked into the rear reflector. The pink mass had changed its course, and was crawling along behind us, evidently at an increased rate of progression, for otherwise we would have been out of sight by now.

We all felt pretty creepy, I assure you. But it seemed ridiculous to imagine that the thing could overtake us. Even at our moderate speed, we were gaining upon it momently; and, if need be, we could treble our rate or soar to higher atmospheric levels. But even at that the whole business made a very disagreeable impression.

Before long we plunged into a belt of thick vapors and lost sight of our pursuer. We seemed to be traversing a sort of swamp, for we caught glimpses of titan reeds and mammoth aquatic plants amid winding stretches of voluminously steaming water. We heard the bellow of unknown leviathans, and saw the dim craning of their hideous heads on interminable necks as we passed. And once the coaster was covered with boiling spray from a marsh-geyser or volcano, and we flew blindly till we were out of it again. Then we crossed a lake of burning oil or mineral pitch, with flames that were half a mile in height; and the temperature rose uncomfortably in spite of our refrigerating system. Then there were more marshes, involved in rolling steam. And after an hour or two we emerged from the vapors, and another zone of prodigiously luxuriant jungle began to reveal its fronded tops below us.

Flying over that jungle was like moving in a hashish eternity. There was no end to it and no change—it simply went on and on through a world without limits or horizons. And the white, vaporous glare of the swollen sun, ever at zenith, became a corroding torture to nerves and brain. We all felt a terrific fatigue, more from the nervous tax than anything else. Manville and Rocher went to sleep, Markheim nodded at his post, and I began to watch for a place where I could bring the coaster safely down and take a nap myself. The vessel would have kept its own course, if I had set the gears; but I didn't want to miss anything, or take any chance of collision with a high mountain-range.

Well, it seemed there was no place to land in that interminable bristling wilderness of cyclopean growths. We flew on, and I grew sleepier and sleepier. Then, through the swirling mists ahead, I saw the vague looming of low mountains. There were bare, needle-sharp peaks and long, gentle scaurs of a blackish stone, almost entirely covered with red and yellow lichens taller than heather. It all looked very peaceful and desolate. I brought the coaster down on a level shelf of one of the scaurs, and fell asleep almost before the heavy thudding of the engines had died.

I DON'T know what it was that awakened me. But I sat up with a start, with a preternaturally distinct awareness that

something was wrong. I glanced around at my companions, who were all slumbering quietly. And then I peered into the reflectors, where the entire landscape about us was depicted.

I was unable to believe it for a moment—that worm-colored glacier that had crawled up the scarp beneath us, and was now hanging over the vessel like a sheer, immeasurable, flowing precipice. It had reached out in mighty arms on either side, as if to surround us. It seemed to blot out the misty heavens as it hung there, pulsing and darkening and all a-slaver with rills of a hueless fluid from the mouths that had formed in its front. I lost a few precious seconds ere I could start the atomic engines; and as the vessel rose, the top of that loathsome cliff lengthened out and fell over like the crest of a breaking billow. It caught us with a buffeting shock, it enveloped us, we went down tossing and pitching as into a sea-trough; and our interior grew dark and blind till I switched on the lights.

The vessel was now lurching nose downward, as that unbelievable wave sucked it in. My companions were awake, and I shouted half-incoherent orders to them as I turned on the full power of our cylinders and also set the electro-solar turbines going. The sides and ceiling of the coaster seemed to bend inward with the pressure as we sought to wrench ourselves free. My companions had flown to the machine-guns, they pumped them incessantly, and bolts of electronic force tore like a broadside of lightning into the mass that had engulfed us. We tried literally to blast ourselves out, with each gun revolving at the widest possible radius. I don't know how it was ever done; but at last the pressure above us began to give, there was a glimmering of light through our rear ports, and pitching dizzily, we broke loose. But even as the light returned, something dripped on my bare arms from the ceiling—a thin rill of water-clear fluid that seared like vitriol and almost laid me out with the sheer agony as it ate into my flesh. I heard some one scream and fall, and turning my head, saw Manville writhing on the floor beneath a steady drip of the same fluid. The roof and walls of the coaster were rent in several places, and some of the rifts were widening momently. That execrable liquid, which doubtless served as both saliva and digestive juice, had been eating the adamantine-tempered metal like acid, and we had not escaped any too soon.

The next few minutes were worse than a whole herd of nightmares. Even with our double engine-power, even with the machine-guns still tearing at the mass beside us, it was a struggle to get away, to combat the malign extra-gravitational magnetism of that hellish life-substance. And all the while, Venusian air was pouring in through the rents and our atmosphere was becoming unbreathable. Also the refrigerating system was half useless now, and we sweltered in a steaming inferno, till each of us donned his air-tight insulative suit in turn, while the others held to the guns and the steering. Manville had ceased to writhe, and we saw that he was dead. We would not have dared to look at him overlong, even if there had been time; for half his face and body were eaten away by the corroding liquid.

We soared gradually, till we could look down on the horror that had so nearly devoured us. There it was, mile on mile of it stretching up the mountainside, with the farther end somewhere in the jungle below. It seemed impossible, in view of the distance we had traversed, that the thing was the same life-mass we had met earlier in the day. But whatever it was, it must have smelt us out some-

how; and seemingly it didn't mind scaling a mountain to get us. Or perhaps it was in the habit of climbing mountains. Anyway, it was hard to discourage, for our gun-fire seemed to make mere pinholes in it that closed up again when the gunner's aim shifted. And when we started to drop grenades upon it from our hard-won elevation, it merely throbbed and heaved a little more vehemently, and darkened to a cancerous red as if it were getting angry. And when we flew off on the way we had come, toward the jungle and the swamp beyond, the damnable thing started to flow backward beneath us along the lichen-mantled slope. Evidently it was determined to have us.

I reeled in the seat with the pain of my seared arms as I held our course. We were in no condition to continue the circuit of Venus; and there was nothing for it but a return to the Purple Mountains.

We flew at top speed, but that flowing mass of life—protoplasm, organism, or whatever it was—fairly raced us. At last we got ahead of it, where it slithered in mile-wide devastation through the jungle—but not very far ahead at that. It hung on interminably, and we all grew sick with watching it.

Suddenly we saw that the thing had ceased to follow us, and was veering off at a sharp angle.

"What do you make of that?" cried Markheim. We were all so amazed by the cessation of pursuit, that I halted the vessel and we hung in midair, wondering what had happened.

Then we saw. Another endless mass, of a vermin-like gray, was crawling through the jungle to meet the pink mass. The two seemed to rise up in sheer columns, like warring serpents, as they neared each other. Then they came together; and we could see that they were battling, were devouring each other, were gaining and losing alternately as they flowed back and forth in a huge area from which all vegetation was speedily blotted. At length the pink mass appeared to have won a decisive victory; it poured on and on, without cease, ingesting the other, driving it back. And we watched no longer, but resumed our flight toward the Purple Mountains.

I have no very distinct recollection of that flight: it is all a blur of incalescent vapors, of boundless, fuming forests, of blazing bitumen lakes and volcano-spouting marshes. I lived in a reeling eternity of pain, sickness, vertigo; and, toward the last, a raging delirium in which I was no longer aware of my surroundings, except by fits and starts. I don't know how I held on, how I kept the course: my subliminal mind must have done it, I suppose. The others were all pretty sick, too, and could not have helped me. I seemed to be fighting an immeasurable, formless monster in that delirium; and after a dozen eons of inconclusive combat, I came out of it long enough to see that the Purple Mountains were jutting their horns from the vapors just ahead. Dimly I steered along the jungle-taken pass and across the plateau; and the glaring heavens turned to a sea of blackness, a sea that fell and bore me down to oblivion as I landed the coaster beside the glimmering bulk of the ether-ship.

SOMEHOW, very tortuously and vaguely, I floated out of that sea of blackness. I seemed to take hours in regaining full awareness; and the process was painful and confusing, as if my brain were unwilling to function. When I finally came to myself, I was lying in my bunk on the ether-ship, and Admiral Carfax and the two doctors of the expedition were beside me, together with Markheim and Rocher. They told me I had been unconscious for fifty hours. My collapse, they thought, had been partly due to un-

natural nerve-strain and shock. But my arms were both in a terrible state from the ravages of the vitriolic animal fluid that had dripped upon them. It had been necessary to amputate my left arm at the elbow; and only the most skilful care had saved the other from a like fate. My companions, though ill to the point of nausea, had retained consciousness, and had told the story of our unbelievable adventures.

"I don't see how you drove the coaster," said Carfax. This, from our reticent and praise-sparing chief, was an actual brevet.

My right arm was a long time in healing—indeed, it never became quite normal again, never regained the muscular strength and nervous quickness required for aviation or space-flying. And I wasn't so sorry, either: my nerves were badly shaken; and I was content to let others do their share, when the holes in the acid-eaten coaster had been calked with metal melted by our heat-tubes, and another exploring party was sent out along the equator.

We waited for a hundred hours on the plateau in the Purple Mountains; but the coaster didn't return. Radio communication with it had ceased after the first nine hours. The second coaster was put together, and went out with Admiral Carfax himself in charge. Markheim and Rocher also insisted on going along. We kept in touch with the vessel till it began to approach the enormous tundras in which the sunlit hemisphere of Venus terminates, and beyond which are the frozen realms of perpetual twilight and darkness. The radio reports were full of incredible things, and I won't tell you how many of those moving life-masses were sighted, eating their way through the hideously fertile jungles or crawling out of the steam-enveloped Venusian seas that gave them birth. Nothing, however, was found of the first coaster. Then the reports ceased; and a black horror settled upon us who had remained in the ether-ship.

The huge space-vessel was ill-adapted to horizontal flight within atmospheric levels. But we set out anyway, and tried to find the coasters, though we all knew there could no longer be anything to find. I won't detail our trip: we all saw enough to turn our stomachs permanently; and those horrors of immeasurable life were sweet and charming in comparison with some of the things that our searchlights revealed on the dark side of the planet. . . . Anyhow, we gave it up at last, and came back to earth. And I, for one, have been well satisfied to remain on Terra Firma. Others can do the exploring, and work the Venusian mines and plantations. I know too well the fate of those lost parties and their vessels. And I know what has happened to the warehouses of neo-manganese steel that have utterly disappeared and have been replaced by a half-grown jungle.

Tam, Son of The Tiger

By OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

A thrilling story of a subterranean world under the Tibetan plateau, with the very gods of Asia as actors

The Story Thus Far

"YOUR son, Tam, has been carried off by a white tigress."

These were the words that greeted Major Charles Evans, American sportsman and philanthropist, when he returned to the native village where he had left his two-year-old son, after a tiger hunt in the Burmese jungle.

But instead of devouring the boy, as his father thought, the white tigress, who had lost three of her four cubs, adopted Tam, and raised him in a pagoda in an old temple ruin that stood in the heart of the jungle. Her remaining cub was Tam's only playmate.

Tam's foster mother had been reared by a lama named Lozong, who had gone on a pilgrimage. Lozong later returned to find the cub full-grown and Tam about half-grown, living and acting exactly like a tiger.

The lama made friends with all three, and being well educated, taught Tam much from his store of knowledge. In his youth he had been a brigand leader and a mighty fighter. He spent much time coaching Tam in the use of weapons, particularly the *yatagan*, a terrible, double-curved sword with which he could cut down a tall tree at a single stroke.

The boy made friends with many jungle creatures, including a huge bull elephant, which he named Ganesha. At the age of twenty, Tam had the strength and bravery of a tiger, a good education, a knowledge of the jungle such as only its creatures possess, and an almost uncanny ability with weapons.

One day Ganesha strayed off into the jungle. Tam, while hunting for him, rescued a beautiful girl in golden armor from a man-eating tiger. Speaking a language which resembled both Sanskrit and Tibetan, both of which Tam understood, she told him her name was Nina, and that she came from a subterranean world called Iramatri. She was hungry, and Tam shot a peacock for her. But while they were cooking it they were attacked by a band of four-armed giants riding on strange beasts larger than elephants, and assisted by a number of hairy, primitive men. They carried off the girl, leaving Tam, apparently dead, but in reality only stunned by a blow from a mace.

Ganesha the elephant found the unconscious Tam and stood guard over him until he recovered his senses, which was not until the following morning. Tam immediately set out on the trail of Nina's abductors in the hope that he might be able to rescue her. When he had followed them for seven days they entered a passageway leading under the hills, concealed in a niche behind a colossal statue of the goddess, Nina. Following them through the passageway, Tam came into a strange subterranean world lighted by a blue-white radiance which streamed down through the silver mists that formed its sky.

Here in this underworld jungle he was attacked by a huge prehistoric carnivore —an andrewsarchus—and dragged down from his elephant.

In the meantime, Tam's father, who had sworn to devote his life to the slaying of tigers because his son had been carried off by a tigress, and a scientist

friend, Doctor Green, had seen Nina's bodyguard massacred by the white, four-armed giants, or Saivas, followers of Siva, the Destroyer. He and the doctor had trailed the Saivas, and had met Lozong, who with the white tigress and her striped offspring were looking for Tam.

They joined forces and followed Tam into the underground world. Here Major Evans came up in time to save his son's life by shooting the andrewsarchus which had pulled Tam down. Then his party was surrounded by a band of four-armed blue giants mounted on white baluchitheriums.

Tam, not knowing that his father had saved his life, but believing that his arrow had penetrated the heart of the beast, looked back and saw the party surrounded by the blue riders. He did not know whether they were friends or enemies, and pressed on to save the girl in the golden armor from her captors. He followed the Saivas to a point near one of their immense cities, but was here ambushed and taken into the city a prisoner by the Saiva's hairy primitive allies.

Led before Ranya, lord of the city and lieutenant of Siva, he was permitted to see Nina for a moment, then condemned to death. A trap was sprung, which dropped him into a black pit, far below the surface of the earth.

As he lay there in the darkness, bound and helpless, a huge slimy thing with luminous eyes came forward to devour him.

CHAPTER 10

The Thing in the Pit

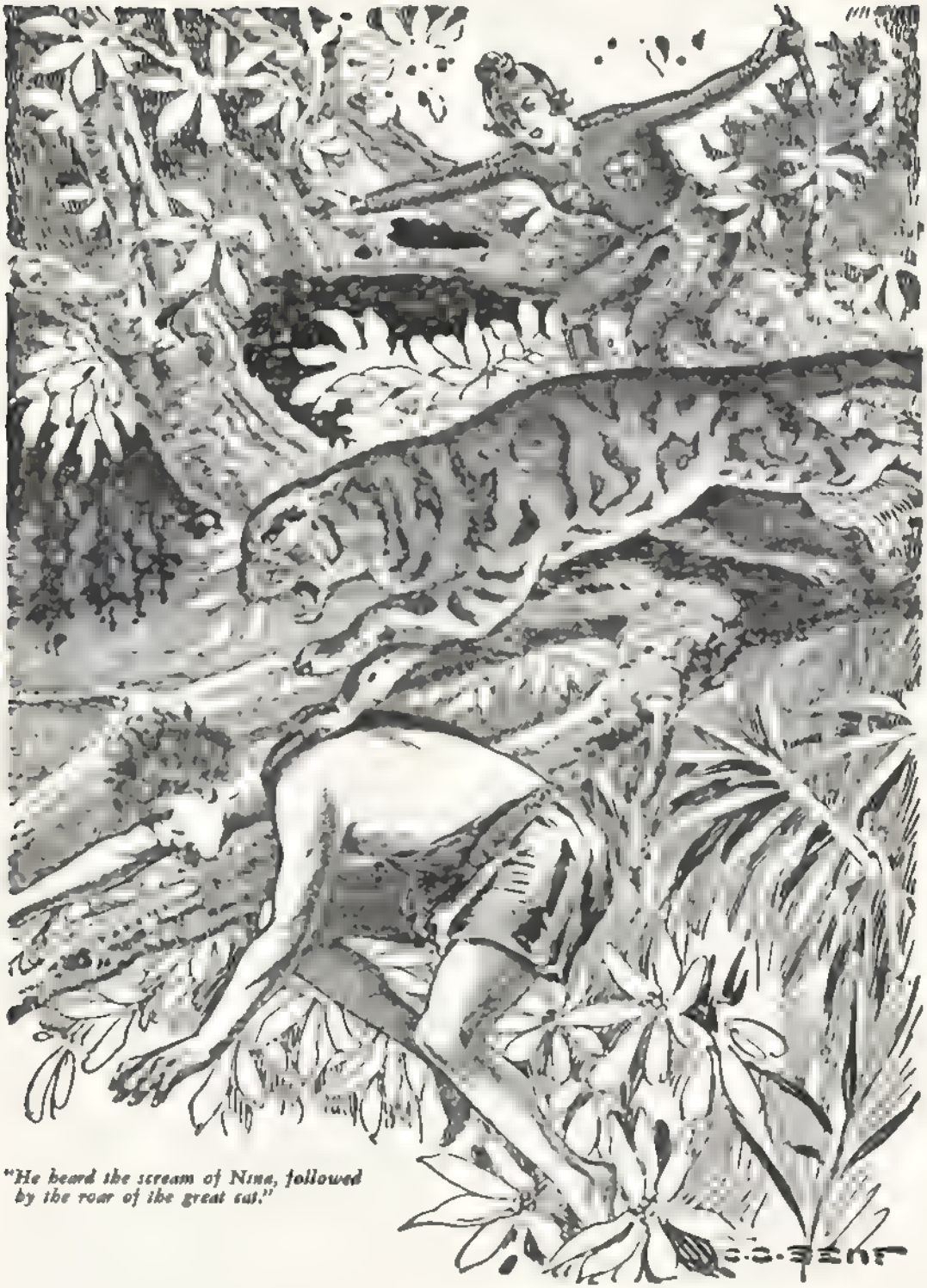
As the company of blue-skinned, four-armed giants, mounted on white baluchitheriums, surrounded his party, Major Evans raised his rifle to bring down the nearest attacker. He had not understood the warning of Dhava, the Aryan, nor did he realize the menace of the *chakras,* the terrible quoit-like weapons which the newcomers carried. But Doctor Green both understood and was quick to recognize the danger.

"Don't shoot, major, for God's sake!" he cried. "If you do, we'll all be cut to pieces."

But he spoke too late. The rifle cracked, and a blue monster pitched from the saddle. Instantly the air was filled with flying, razor-edged rings. One of these sheared off the top of the major's helmet, glanced from the steel casque of Dhava, and passed out through the back of the howdah. A second gashed the shoulder of Yusuf, and a third snapped the stem of the doctor's favorite briar only an inch from his bearded lips. With an oath, he caught up the rifle and began firing. Yusuf followed suit, and the major continued coolly to pick off the blue giants.

Mingled with the barking of the rifles and the deadly hissing whine of the *chakras* were the yells of the contestants, the trumpeting of the elephants, the bellowing of the baluchitheriums and the roars of the two tigers. Disconcerted by the din of battle, Leang, the white tigress, and Chiam, her striped offspring, charged toward the jungle. They were confronted by a blue rider, who couched his trident like a lance, and would probably have impaled the tigress had it not been for Lozong, who hurled his long spear. It pierced the breast of the rider, who dropped his trident and lurched forward in the saddle. The two tigers shot past him into the jungle, and Lozong followed, pursued by two more of the riders. But they could not penetrate the dense thicket with their huge mounts, and soon returned.

In the meantime, a number of the blue giants had dismounted, and while these advanced on foot, the others charged with tridents couched. The men in the



"He heard the scream of Nina, followed by the roar of the great cat."

howdah made the mistake of concentrating their fire on those who remained mounted. They discovered this too late, as those on foot attacked the elephants, hamstringing and disemboweling them with their keen *tulwars*. In a trice, all three great pachyderms were down. The howdah, falling sideways, piled its four occupants in a tangled heap. Before they could recover they were seized, dragged forth, and disarmed by the exultant Vaishnavas.

All four were wounded, cut by the flying *chakras*, though not badly. Like their beasts, the three mahouts had been slain—literally hacked to pieces by the sharp *tulwars*. And a score of the blue riders had fallen, to rise no more.

Swiftly, the giant warriors bound the hands of the four survivors, then led them before one, evidently the leader or chief, who had remained mounted on his great white beast. He seemed puzzled at the costumes of the two Americans and the Pathan, but instantly recognized the accouterments and insignia of Dhava. To the latter he addressed his speech.

"What brings you here into the hunting-grounds of the Vaishnavas, Aryan, in violation of the age-old treaty?" he demanded. "And who are these strangers with you?"

"I follow my princess," replied Dhava, "who was captured by the ruffians of Siva. These other white ones be two great chiefs of a hunting-party from the outer world. The dark-skinned man is their servant."

"Men of the outer world, here! And the Princess of all Arya captured! What manner of tale is this?"

"You are doubtless aware of the Destroyer's plot to conquer the outer world."

"Yes. He sought the assistance of His Majesty, Vishnu, in the project, but was refused."

"He also asked the aid of my princess, and was refused," said Dhava. "Accompanied by only a few of her soldiers, she rode forth through the portal to warn the peoples of the outer world. But Siva, through his spies, learned of this, and sent his lieutenant, Ranya, to capture her. This he succeeded in doing after killing all of her men but your humble servant."

"Through the portal! How did they pass our guardians?"

"By avoiding the road and keeping to the jungle. Even now, Ranya and his Saivas are carrying my princess across your hunting-grounds. It was their trail we followed."

"So! We must double the guard, and keep a closer watch. Five thousand years ago the Seven Who Rule ordained that none should pass the portal. And for five thousand years have the guardians enforced this command. Because we were careless, the rule has been broken—the law transgressed—but we will see that it does not happen again."

"And what will you do with these strangers and me? We but followed, to rescue the princess, and have done no wrong."

"You have passed through the portal twice, and they, once. All of you have trespassed on the game preserves of Vishnu. And twenty of my warriors have been slain by the strange weapons of these earthlings. Yet you say you have done no wrong!"

"The strangers were not aware of the ancient laws. And I but followed in the line of duty. As for your dead warriors, they would still be alive had you not attacked our party."

"It is not for you to question, nor for me to judge. We will take you before the Lord Vishnu."

"But what of my princess? May I not acquaint our people with the duplicity of Siva?"

"That, too, will rest with Vishnu, the

Preserver. If the Aryans learn of her capture it will mean war. And His Majesty is opposed to war. But no profit to discuss these things with me. I but serve and obey." He turned to the nearest riders who had grouped about him. "Up with them, warriors, and let us be on our way."

As the two burning, red-rimmed eyes moved stealthily toward him through the darkness of the black pit in which he had been confined, Tam heard a slithering sound, as of an immense something, wet and slimy, being dragged across the floor. A huge bulk, its surface slightly phosphorescent, began to take shape behind the glowing eyes

With all the tigerish strength at his command, he strained at the tough thongs that held his wrists. Presently one parted. Then another snapped, and the rest fell away. His hands free, Tam faced the creeping monster, crouching like a tiger at bay. Though weaponless, he was far from helpless, for from early childhood he had been trained to fight as beasts fight, with the weapons with which nature had provided him.

The thing was so close now that he could see the outlines of its huge, semi-luminous bulk. It was about seven feet high, four feet wide, and ten feet long —its back a great, rounded, shell-covered hump. It had no feet, but moved by a flowing motion of the lower portion of its body. Its glowing eyes were upreared on stalks like those of barnacles. And the sickening, musty stench which emanated from it was so powerful as to overcome the charnel odors of the pit.

Suddenly the thing arched its neck. Tam could see the bulging muscles rippling beneath the slimy skin, and the hundreds of needle-like teeth that lined the circular mouth as it opened to grip the supposedly helpless food morsel before it.

As the head struck down at him, Tam grasped an eye-stalk with each hand, attempting to twist the thing to one side and throw it, as he would throw a deer by its antlers. But to his surprize, the head suddenly jerked backward, and together with the entire slimy body was retracted into the shell. The eye-stalks came out in his hands, and he was about to throw them from him when he noticed that together they cast a light which enabled him to see for a few feet around him.

Ignoring the humped and motionless bulk of the now sightless thing which had sought to devour him, Tam began an exploration of the place by the light of the two glowing eyes. He found that he was in a circular pit about thirty feet in diameter, hollowed out of the damp earth. The floor was littered with moldering human bones, evidently the source of the charnel odor. About ten feet above the floor he could see the mouth of a square shaft extending upward from the roof of the pit. This was the only opening into the place, hence it must have been through it that the elevator with the trap floor had dropped him.

Tucking the stalks of the two luminous eyes in his belt, Tam stepped back a few paces, then ran and sprang for the opening. Catching the edge with hooked fingers, he drew himself up on a narrow rafter which formed one of the sides of the shaft opening. The walls, he found, were reinforced with masonry, the stones of which were so smoothly fitted together that they would not afford even a finger hold. But dangling quite near him were two thick cables, united at the bottom and extending upward into the darkness.

To Tam, with his years of jungle training, a cable was as simple a means

of ascent as a stairway would have been to a city-bred man. With the glowing eyes dangling from his belt and lighting up the shaft for several feet around him, he began the climb.

It was a long way, so long that even a stairway would have proved arduous, and iron-muscled though he was, Tam was forced to make several stops to rest, clinging with hands and toes. After about twenty minutes of climbing and resting, he reached the top of the shaft. It was blocked by the elevator, but the cracks around it admitted thin blades of light. And in the room above he could hear voices, the clank of arms, and the ponderous tread of the Saivas.

He swung over onto a girder for a welcome rest after the prolonged strain of clinging to the rope, and sat there listening to the conversation above him. Some one, evidently one of the throneroom guards, had just come before the dais.

"The messenger of His Majesty, Siva the Destroyer, has just arrived, my lord," Tam heard him say.

"Admit him," commanded a voice which Tam recognized as that of the Lord Ranya.

There followed more tramping, and the greetings exchanged between the messenger and the man on the throne. Then:

"What are the commands of His Majesty regarding the royal prisoner?" asked Ranya.

"She is to be conducted to Saivatun at once, under heavy guard," replied the messenger, "where, if His Majesty can not bring her to reason, she will be held as a hostage while he treats with her subjects."

"It shall be done immediately," said Ranya.

Tam heard him order one of his officers to equip a cavalcade. Then he dismissed the court. There was the tread of many feet, followed by silence.

APPARENTLY the throneroom was deserted. If so, it was Tam's opportunity to make his escape from the shaft. With the aid of the luminous eyes, he looked about him. He was surrounded by a bewildering array of levers, rods, wheels, girders and cables. The mechanism which raised and lowered the panels of glass surrounding the top of the shaft was quite complicated. And that which operated the elevator was only slightly less so. To Tam, unacquainted with machinery of any kind, they were unsolvable enigmas.

He tried to push the trap-door upward, but it would not budge. Then he noticed that it was kept from dropping by three pins, all connected to a sliding rod which, when moved, would let it tilt downward as far as the girder on which he stood. Very carefully he moved the rod, supporting the door meanwhile with one hand so that it would not fall suddenly and make a noise that would alarm the palace guards.

He succeeded in letting it down soundlessly, then cautiously peered over the edge of the floor. As he had surmised, the throneroom was deserted, but he could see the broad back of a guard standing in the doorway.

With cat-like silence, he drew himself up and crept toward the guard. But just as he came up behind him, Tam lost all the advantage his silent approach had given him. One of the floor tiles had become loosened, and when he trod upon it, clicked so loudly that the sound echoed across the room.

Instantly the guard swung around, presenting the barbed triple-point of his trident. As his eyes fell on Tam he gave a grunt of surprize, then lunged at him with the weapon.

With the lightning quickness which his years of association with tigers had taught him, Tam leaped clear over the

vicious prongs, and swinging in close, snatched the ornate hilt of the long *tulwar* which hung at the giant's side and whipped it from its sheath. The monster dropped the now useless trident and seized him with three huge hands, while the fourth unhooked the mace from the broad belt and swung it aloft.

But in that instant, Tam had drawn back the weapon and thrust with all his might. It passed clear through the huge chest of the monster, half its length protruding from his back. For a moment the giant's face was contorted with a death spasm. Then the mace clattered to the floor. The huge hands released their grip on the youth and clutched wildly at the air. Tam jerked the *tulwar* free just as the great hulk toppled backward, striking the tiles with a terrific jolt and a clank of metal.

Fearful lest the sounds of conflict had been heard, Tam looked up and down the hallway. Not a soul was in sight. Swiftly he removed the broad belt which held the scabbard for the *tulwar* and the hook for the mace, from around the huge waist. But when he tried to buckle it around his own middle, he found that even with the buckle drawn up to the last hole there was room for three of him and the long scabbard dragged on the floor. So he threw it over his right shoulder instead, and cleaning the blade of the *tulwar* on his fallen enemy's wolfskin breechclout, sheathed it. Then he caught up the heavy mace and hurried off down the hallway.

Tam remembered the small, round room—the elevator—which had brought him up from the ground level, and quickly made his way to its door. But when he opened it, all he saw was a black shaft extending up and down farther than he could see. There were two cables in the shaft, and they were moving, one down, the other up. What could be simpler than to travel downward on the descending cable?

Hooking the thong of the mace in the belt, he leaped out, catching the cable with both hands. As it passed him when he had stood in the doorway it had not appeared to travel swiftly, but it carried him downward with a speed that took his breath. Presently it came to a stop with an unexpected jerk that chafed the skin from his fingers and palms. He slid for about twenty feet before he could check his own momentum. In a moment the cable started downward once more.

Now accustomed to the semi-darkness of the shaft, Tam could see the car, far above him, descending. Each time it made a stop his lacerated hands were injured anew. And each time it descended he shot downward with terrific speed. Presently he came to a place where the cable formed a half-loop, to turn and travel upward. About eight feet below this loop was the bottom of the shaft. He dropped.

Looking about him, he discovered there was no way out. The elevator was meanwhile coming down with terrific speed. Like a trapped animal, he crouched there in the bottom of the shaft, expecting to be crushed beneath the descending car. To his surprize it came to a stop about fifteen feet above him. He heard several passengers get out and more get in. Then the door closed and the car shot upward.

CATCHING hold of the ascending cable, Tam rode up until he was on a level with the first doorway. Then he leaped, alighting on the narrow sill. For a moment he swayed with flailing arms in an effort to keep his balance. Then he righted himself and flattened against the door.

Opening it a little way, he peered into the room beyond. He could see a long

row of stalls in which were tethered the huge mounts of the Saivas. Behind these was a wide passageway, on the other side of which was another row of stalls in which the animals faced in the opposite direction. Scurrying about in the passageway were numerous attendants carrying saddles, bridles and harness, and hauling in enormous chariots with iron tires which were plated and embellished with much polished brass.

Under the directions of an officer, the menials were saddling many of the animals, and hitching others in teams to the chariots. At some distance down the passageway Tam also saw a magnificent golden litter hung on two thills between two beasts hitched tandem.

Near him he could hear the conversation of two of the hostlers. One was saddling a giant beast while the other held its bridle.

"An unseemly time of night to start an expedition," complained the first, as he tugged at the cinch while the surly brute arched its back, expanded its belly and squealed an angry protest. "What is the occasion?"

"I have just heard," replied the other, "that they will convey Nina, Princess of Arya, to Saivatun in the royal sedan, by explicit order of His Majesty, Siva himself."

"Well, I for one will be glad when they are on their way," grumbled the first, "so I can return to my couch. This makes the third night I've been awakened to saddle for their accursed expeditions."

Tam heard the slam of a door only a short distance above him. Looking up the shaft, he saw that the elevator was descending rapidly. Either he must leap back to the bottom of the shaft, or risk being seen by going out into the stables. If he failed to do one or the other he would be crushed by the descending car.

Peering out, he saw a large chariot passing, drawn by four men. Other men were leading two beasts out of the stalls, which evidently were to be hitched to the chariot.

Opening the door, Tam slipped out, and silently closed it behind him. A leap carried him behind the chariot and temporarily out of sight of the hostlers. But when he looked about him, he could see no further place of concealment. The chariot was piled with bales and bundles, evidently camping-equipment, to be taken on the journey to Saivatun. At sight of these a plan occurred to him for not only concealing himself, but for getting out of the city and following Nina, undetected.

He sprang up into the chariot, pulled back a large bundle, and squeezing in behind it dragged it over him. A moment later the chariot stopped, and he could hear the hostlers hitching the beasts to it. Then the elevator door opened and several Saivas, evidently soldiers from the clank of their weapons, stepped out.

"Ho, Fenma," shouted one, evidently addressing the officer in charge of the grooms. "Have you or any of your Saivas seen aught of a dark-haired Aryan youth? The son of the white tigress has escaped from the Black Pit, slain the throneroom guard, and carried off his *tulwar* and mace. Lord Ranya is furious, and has ordered that the building be searched from roof to dungeons."

"He has not passed through the stables," replied Fenma. "Of that I am certain. I, or some of my grooms, would certainly have seen him."

"We'll just take a look around, anyway," said the soldier, "as His Excellency ordered a thorough search."

Crouching breathlessly there in the chariot, Tam heard them clanking and poking about. One came up and thrust a *tulwar* between the bundles. The cold

steel touched his neck as the soldier withdrew it.

"Not here," he said. "We've looked everywhere in this place. Let's try the next floor, warriors."

A moment later Tam heard them take the elevator.

There followed interminable minutes that seemed like hours to Tam, cramped in his narrow quarters. Then, at a sharp command from the officer in charge, the entire cavalcade was led away by the grooms.

Presently they ascended a steep ramp which caused the bundles in the chariot to slide toward the rear. Only by gripping the one in front of him was Tam able to keep it from tilting over backward and exposing him. But the ramp leveled out at last, and they passed through an arched entrance into the city street. Here warriors took charge of the beasts, climbing into the chariots and mounting the saddle animals. A tall warrior stepped up into Tam's chariot, walked to the front in the narrow lane which had been left between the stacked bundles, and took the reins from the groom.

PEERING through an interstice between the bundles, Tam saw the golden sedan carried by the two great beasts brought up before a doorway of the great central building. Here the riders caused the beast to kneel, bringing the lower step of the sedan to the ground level. A moment later a slight, gold-armored figure he recognized as Nina came down the steps between two giant four-armed guards. They helped her into the sedan. The beasts carrying it stood up, and two warriors rode up to take a post on either side.

There was a ringing command from an officer at the head of the column, and the cavalcade started, the iron-tired wheels of the chariots making a terrific clatter on the paving stones, which mingled with the thunderous hoofbeats of the huge beasts.

Presently they passed through a city gate, and out onto a broad, paved highway. As he peered out between the bundles, Tam saw that it was not the road on which he had been carried up to the city, a prisoner of the Zargs. As they passed out of range of the bright city lights, he noticed that the countryside was lighted with a silvery radiance that resembled moonlight, except that it had a slight violet tinge. He looked up, half expecting to see the moon hanging in the sky, but all he could see was the envelope of silvery mists through which the brighter light of day had come.

For a short distance the highway was built on a causeway which crossed a dismal swamp. Here the clatter of the cavalcade did not completely drown the croaking of frogs, the drone of countless millions of insects, and the occasional bellowing or roaring of the mightier swamp creatures.

The swamp passed, the road entered a dense forest. And here, almost in the shadow of the towers and battlements of the city, Tam recklessly resolved to attempt to rescue Nina and escape.

There was but one chariot between him and the golden sedan, and if fortune should favor him he might be able to slip past it without attracting the attention of the driver. Silently he pushed the bundle aside and slid to the ground. As he was behind the driver of his chariot, the driver did not notice him.

Crouching low, he dodged around to the left and scurried past the next chariot. But as ill luck would have it, the charioteer spied him just as he passed. The fellow had no time to use his trident, but turned and shouted a warning to those who guarded the sedan.

In the meantime, however, Tam had shot past the surprized first rider of the tandem which bore the princess, and reached the step of the sedan with a tremendous leap.

Startled by his sudden appearance, Nina gave a little scream as he parted the curtains. Without a word, he seized her around the waist, and turning, made a leap for the jungle.

But the Saiva who rode guard on that side was a fraction of a second too quick for him. Spurring his mount up beside the sedan, the monster wrenched the girl from his grasp. Thrown off his balance, Tam fell on his side as the great beast thundered past.

Holding Nina across his saddlebow, the Saiva wheeled his mount, and charging back at Tam, thrust viciously at him with his trident.

CHAPTER 11

Lozong Finds the Trail

When Lozong and the two tigers escaped from the Vaishnavas, they separated. But they soon got together again, deep in the forest, when all sounds of pursuit had ceased.

The militant lama was not a man to desert comrades in danger, even under the most adverse conditions. But he knew that to return to the conflict in the face of the overwhelming odds against him would mean that he would surely be killed or captured. And in either case his ability to assist either them or Tam would be gone.

But it was around Tam that all his loyalty and affection centered, and he resolved that, since fate had deprived him of his companions, he would continue on the dangerous trail of his beloved *chela* alone.

With the two tigers stalking at his heels, he cautiously made his way back toward the scene of the fray. He saw the four survivors of the battle, their hands bound behind them, being taken before the leader of the Vaishnavas. After a short parley, each prisoner was lifted up before one of the mounted blue warriors, and the entire cavalcade cut back through the jungle path toward the highway.

When the last mounted giant had disappeared in the jungle, he left his place of concealment and went back to the scene of the conflict. The Vaishnavas had left their dead comrades where they had fallen, nor had they troubled to gather their *chakras,* or other weapons, though they had taken the rifles of the prisoners.

Recovering his long spear from the body of the blue giant he had slain, Lozong called to the two tigers. But they were crouched beside one of the fallen baluchitheriums slain by rifle fire, eating, and would not leave it. The sight of the two beasts devouring the fresh meat brought the realization that he, too, was hungry, and he saw no reason why the flesh of the great beasts, if not toothsome, should not be at least wholesome.

Kindling a fire with the flint and steel he carried and making use of the dry dead wood which was abundant at the edge of the jungle, he carved a baluchitherium steak and broiled it. To his surprize and delight he found it as tasty as any meat he had ever eaten. By the time he had finished his meal the tigers had gorged themselves and were ready to follow him.

He struck off at once on Tam's trail, and by the time night had fallen, reached the river. Here, after man and beasts had drunk their fill, they crept into a dense thicket and curled up for a nap.

Despite his bravery, and the fact that he had two fierce and courageous beasts with him, Lozong was able to sleep but little because of the terrific din made by the river monsters and the fierce jungle

creatures which had come down to the water to drink. And so when, after a few hours, the landscape was flooded by a silvery light which, except for a slight violet shade, resembled the rays of the moon, he decided to press on.

ROUSING the two tigers, he set off once more on the trail, which the beasts followed by scent. Some time later he came to a paved highway. Here the muddy tracks of Tam's elephant turned to the left, mingling with those of a cavalcade of baluchitheriums. He followed the highway across an arched stone bridge, and a little way beyond this came upon a number of large, hyena-like animals quarreling over the remains of a score of dead Zargs. This grisly sight convinced him that Tam had been waylaid by the hairy troglodytes, and that he and Ganesha had given a good account of themselves. But whether Tam had been killed or captured, or had escaped, he had no means of knowing.

As he had no desire to dispute the right of way with the formidable-looking creatures before him, nor to embroil the two tigers with them, Lozong resolved to circle through the jungle, then return to the highway and look for Ganesha's trail.

He accordingly turned to the right and entered the dense tangle of vegetation. But he had not gone far when a peculiar mewing cry came from Leang, the white tigress, which led him to think she had found Tam's trail. Hurrying after her, he discovered, not Tam's footprints, but those of Ganesha, the elephant—great, deep "pugs" in the soft leaf-mold, which were easily visible in the violet-silver light that came down in bright patches through rents in the forest roof.

Not doubting that Tam was safe on the back of his big friend, he set off at once on the plainly marked trail. For a time, the tracks showed that Ganesha had been traveling quite swiftly, but presently the steps grew shorter and the way was marked with broken boughs and fallen leaves, showing that he had browsed as he ambled along. At length they brought up at the edge of a swamp. And here Lozong saw what he had not been able to see before because of the height of the jungle trees. The city was plainly visible across the low swamp vegetation, and the trail had been circling around it.

Several deep footprints into which the water had seeped showed where Ganesha, evidently deciding that the swamp was too dangerous to traverse, had backed out and changed his course, following the edge of the marsh but staying up on the more solid ground. And judging from the formidable sounds which came from some of the huge inhabitants of the morass from time to time, Lozong felt that it had been a wise decision in more ways than one. The voices of the jungle monsters sounded dangerous enough, but many of the swamp-dwellers, from their thunderous tones, appeared to have throats large enough to take in an elephant at a single gulp.

It was not long before the violet-silver night-light was replaced by the red glow of dawn. Then the light gradually changed from red to orange, from orange to yellow, and finally to the blazing, blue-white light of day.

In the meantime the trail had turned away from the edge of the swamp, and led toward the northwest. Presently, Lozong discovered something that mystified him for an instant. He had felt positive, all along, that Tam was riding the elephant whose trail he was following. But he suddenly came upon the trail of Tam, whose footprints he would know among a thousand, branching in from another direction. And he was accompanied by some one with tiny feet—evidently the girl in the golden armor. Their tracks

were several hours older than those of Ganesha, showing that he had just come across them and was, even now, following them, probably by scent.

Despite the fact that he was weary from his long journey, Lozong hurried his pace when he saw these signs of the proximity of his *chela*. But despite his quickened gait, several hours passed with no sight of him.

Then, just as the position of the shadows told him that it was midday, he suddenly heard, only a short distance ahead of him, the scream of a girl or woman, evidently in mortal terror. It was followed by the roar of some mighty beast and the angry trumpeting of an elephant mingled with the shouts and shrieks of men.

With the two tigers bounding beside him, Lozong sprinted forward.

CHAPTER 12

To Petition the Gods

As the Saiva who held Nina across his saddle-bow lunged at Tam with his trident, the girl caught and gripped the shaft with all her might. Though she was strong for her size and sex, her strength was puny indeed compared with that of the giant who held her, and she only succeeded in delaying the thrust for a moment.

But during that moment, Tam had sprung aside, then leaped in close, swinging the long keen *tulwar* he had taken from the throneroom guard. With the terrible drawing cut which he had perfected beyond even the uncanny skill of Lozong, his teacher, he brought it down, shearing off at one blow both left arms of his adversary, the second of which held a heavy mace. As the severed limbs, still gripping the trident and mace, fell to the pavement, he brought his blade up a second time, but with a lunge instead of a slash, piercing the heart of the warrior.

As his vanquished enemy fell, Tam wrenched his blade free of the sagging corpse, snatched Nina from the saddle-bow, and swung her across his shoulder. Then he turned and leaped into the jungle, just as several other riders came thundering up.

Swiftly, silently, Tam ran through the jungle, dodging this way and that through the dense tangle of vegetation. Behind, and on both sides of him, he could hear the Saivas, who had dismounted because of the impossibility of forcing their huge beasts through the thick undergrowth, crashing clumsily through the brush and shouting to each other from time to time. The noise they made plainly told Tam where not to go, so that despite the burden he carried, he rapidly outdistanced them.

The sounds of pursuit grew fainter and fainter, finally dying out altogether. He paused in a little glade where the light filtering through the leafy canopy overhead made little silver splashes on the ground, the tree-trunks and the undergrowth. Here he stood the girl on her feet. But to his surprize, her knees sagged from under her, and she would have fallen had he not held her erect. Then he noticed that her head hung limply, and her eyes were closed.

Alarmed, he lowered her gently to the ground, and looked for wounds. But so far as he could see in the dim light, there were none. Having had no previous experience with women, Tam had never seen one faint. But what he had read on the subject convinced him that this was what was wrong with Nina. He removed her heavy helmet and tried all the remedies of which he had read, such as chafing her hands and wrists, raising her feet above the level of her head, and blowing on her eyelids. Lacking water to apply

to her face, he was about to convey her onward in search of a stream or pool, when she opened her eyes.

In the mottled light of the glen she did not at first recognize him, but cringed away in terror. However, her look of fear vanished in an instant when she saw who was bending over her.

"Tam!" she said. "I'm so glad! My last recollection was that I was in the grip of that monster who tried to kill you with his trident."

"He's dead," Tam told her, "and we've given the Saivas the slip, for a time, at least. Would you like to sit up?"

"Please."

Gently he raised her to a sitting position, her fluffy head nestling against his shoulder. He thrilled at the nearness of her, intoxicated by the perfume of her hair, the witchery of her sparkling eyes, the seductive curves of her half-parted lips. Woman, or princess, or goddess—whatever she was—he knew that he loved her madly: would willingly die for her.

"Where are we?" she asked.

"Somewhere in the jungle to the right of the road along which the Saivas were taking you."

"That would be to the northwest of the city," she said. "We must circle Vaishnavarta, the country of Vishnu, for he would be likely to delay us. I must go to Arya at once, and from there make a pilgrimage to the Place of the Gods. I must petition the Seven Who Rule, in whose great names we administer the seven lands of Iramatri."

"Who are the Seven?" asked Tam.

"They are Nina, Indra, Brahm, Vishnu, Siva, Hanuman and Vasuki," she replied. "They are the immortals—the directors of our destinies and the lords of creation. By them, we mortal rulers, each of whom reigns in the name of his or her god or goddess, are guided and directed. I rule in the name of Nina, Great Goddess of the Aryans, and to her am I responsible; or to put it more accurately, Nina, who has nothing directly to do with her worshippers, rules and directs them through me. The same is true of the other mortal rulers, each named for and directed by the god of his people."

"But who or what is this great goddess, Nina?" asked Tam. "Is she a physical being, and if not, how can you communicate with her?"

"That I can not explain to you, nor even to myself," replied the girl. "When she so wills, she directs my thoughts—looks out through my eyes as she did for an instant when I first met you. When I would seek her guidance I go into the holy of holies in one of her temples. There I await her. Sometimes she comes to me in a vision. In appearance she is a reflection of me, or more properly, I am a reflection of her. I doubt that I am her reincarnation, though some sects regard me as such, because she lives on forever. Nor have I achieved her *karma,* which could not be done in a thousand such lives as I am now living. I am, if my mundane understanding serves me correctly, a mortal reflection of an immortal being, doomed to pass through many reincarnations before I have achieved the *karma* which will make me, too, one of the immortals.

"There are three sects of Aryans who differ as to who and what I am. One regards me only as its Princess, working the will of the Goddess, Nina. Another regards me as Princess and High Priestess of Nina, and a third regards me as a triune being—Goddess, High Priestess and Princess. I can neither prove nor disprove any of their beliefs, nor can they, though they argue and debate much among themselves. And as I have not achieved the exalted degree of *karma* when all is to be made clear to me, I must

go on doing the best I can, in doubt as to who or what I really am."

"But why this pilgrimage to the Place of the Gods, and for what will you petition the Seven Who Rule?"

"Although Siva, in his resolve to conquer the world, is not supported by the six other immortals, neither have they sought to hinder him. It may be, even, that they will permit him to use the ancient and terrible weapons which they have kept locked away from man for countless generations. If they do, and he bestows them on his followers, he will surely conquer. And so I must petition the gods to keep these weapons from him."

"What of the great Aryan goddess, Nina? Has she not sought to prevent this destruction and to keep Siva from employing these fearful weapons?"

"That has not been revealed to me. But the gods help those who help themselves, and I have taken the initiative in the service, not only of all Arya, but of all allied races of men on the outer earth.

"I know that Nina has the power to prevent the Destroyer's use of these weapons, for she is older and greater than all the gods except Hanuman and Vasuki, and if not older, is greater than either of these. My greatest fear is that, displeased with men, she has turned her sorrowing face away from them, even as she turned from your Sumerians and Akkadians five thousand years ago. If this be true, mankind is doomed. And I, being the spokesman of mankind to Nina, even as I am the mouthpiece of Nina in her communications to man, must make the dangerous pilgrimage to the Dwelling of the Gods, to intercede for the human race."

"The men of the outer earth have developed terrible weapons," said Tam. "Perhaps with these they can successfully withstand the attacks of Siva, even if his followers are armed with the ancient weapons of the gods."

"Can they then combat the thunderbolt, the windstorm or the earthquake? Can they stem the flow of a tidal wave, survive the rush of a river of lava, or prop their flimsy islands and continents so that they can not sink beneath the waters of the mighty oceans as have other continents and islands before them? If they can do all these things, then will they be safe from Siva the Destroyer, armed with the ancient weapons."

"I'm afraid they wouldn't have a chance against such things," said Tam.

"All this and more can the gods do with their potent weapons," said Nina. "And these things can the Saivas do, also, if they are given to them. So you see why it is imperative that we get to Aryatun and make the pilgrimage as soon as possible."

"Tell me which way to go, and I'll carry you," said Tam.

"No, I am feeling stronger now, and can walk. You must save your strength, for there will undoubtedly be fighting. Our path will be constantly beset with dangers. I hate myself for the weakness which made me give way as I did, but I have been through so many horrors recently that my nerves reached the breaking-point. After all, though I am the military as well as the civil and religious leader of my people, I am a woman with no more than a woman's endurance."

She stood up, and taking a small, square instrument with a luminous face from her belt-pouch, glanced at it for a moment.

Tam picked up the helmet and handed it to her.

"I think you are very strong for a woman," he told her, "and very wonderful."

She took the helmet with a smile and adjusted it over her fluffy little head.

"I hope you mean that," she said. "I'm so accustomed to compliments from those who fawn upon me for favors that I have come to doubt the sincerity of all of them."

Tam drew himself up stiffly.

"I do not lie, nor have I ever asked aught of you," he retorted. "If you think for an instant that I——"

"Please." She laid a hand on his arm and looked up pleadingly. "I'm sorry if I've offended you. Perhaps I said what I did because I wanted to believe that you —that I—oh! What am I saying?"

"You wanted to believe——" prompted Tam.

"I wanted to believe you, and now I do," she said, "so I am forgiven and the incident is closed."

She held up the small, luminous-faced instrument.

"Have you ever seen one of these?" she asked.

Tam looked at it, and shook his head.

"No, I haven't," he confessed. "It looks a little like a compass, an instrument carried by travelers on the outer earth, the needle of which always points toward the north."

"This has a somewhat similar use," she told him. "In Aryatun there is a tower which constantly sends out electrical emanations. This little instrument is attuned to these emanations, and none other, though all cities of Iramatri have similar towers, the emanations of which are differently tuned. When I hold the box horizontally the large central arrow always points toward the tower in Aryatun, while the smaller arrow points to a figure on the dial which indicates in *varsads* how far I am from the city. By referring to this little box I can therefore tell, not only in what direction to travel in order to reach the city, but how far I will have to travel."

"A remarkable invention," said Tam. "I take it from the direction of the arrow that we are to travel slightly east of north. Shall I lead the way?"

"We would travel northeast, were it not for the fact that Vaishnavarta lies between us and our objective," said Nina. "But under the circumstances it will be necessary for us to circle that country. Vishnu, if he should capture us, would be certain to detain me to prevent my interference with Siva and the war that must inevitably follow. Vishnu's function is that of preserver, you know, and he endeavors always to maintain peace in Iramatri. For the first hundred *varsads* we will travel northwest, keeping to the southern bank of the river. Then we must cross the river into Hanumavarta, negotiate the jungle ruled over by Hanuman, and the plains and forests of Brahmavarta. Once in the territory of Brahm we will not be molested, except perhaps by wild beasts. The minions of Hanuman I do not trust, as he is the ally of Vishnu. But since they are less formidable and more thinly scattered than the Vaishnavas, I think it best to go that way."

They set off through the jungle, walking side by side when possible, Tam leading the way, *tulwar* in hand, when the pathway was too narrow for other than single file. This subterranean jungle was filled with night noises and scents new and strange to Tam. But though they were different, they were analogous. Here, as in the upper jungles, great carnivores stalked by night, coughing and moaning, or roaring their thunderous mating-calls and challenges to rivals. Others there were, and these by far the most dangerous, that crept silently through the mottled shadows, hunting. From time to time the piteous cries of

their stricken prey attested their deadly prowess. These mightier sounds only punctuated the continuous composite voice of the jungle, in which could be distinguished the soughing of the wind through the trees, the hum of insects, the night calls of birds, and the chattering, barking, squeaking, squealing and howling of the lesser beasts.

With Nina's little instrument as their only guide, they traveled until the first red glow of dawn appeared. Then, while the girl clung to his back, Tam climbed a tall tree. Skilfully he wove a nest far above the ground while she, perched on a limb, watched him with great interest. When it was finished, they curled up in it. Gently rocked by the wind and lulled by the rustling of countless leaves, they soon fell asleep.

TAM was awakened by a shaft of blue-white light streaming down on his face through a rent in the jungle canopy. He judged by the heat and the direction of the shadows that it was about midday. Nina was still asleep, her helmet laid aside and her disarrayed brown tresses blowing across her girlish face. For some time Tam sat there in the swaying nest, feasting his eyes on the lovely picture. But his stomach reminded him that neither of them had eaten or drunk anything, and that she, also, would be hungry on awakening.

Swinging up into the topmost branches of the tree, which was more than a hundred feet tall and towered high above its fellows, he looked about him. Far back toward the southeast he could see the top of the tall *linga* gleaming in the blue-white light. Less than a mile to the north the river which at this point formed the boundary between Saivarta and Vaishnavarta, sparkled and shimmered as it wound between gently sloping banks, clothed with long grass, bushy shrubs and low trees, and dotted with herds of grazing beasts, birds and herbivorous reptiles. Stretching toward the northwest as far as he could see was the jungle, of which the tree in which he stood was a part.

He was about to descend when something else caught his eye. A patrol of nearly a hundred Saivas was coming along the river bank, obviously searching for the two fugitives. The wisdom of Nina's decision not to go near the river was apparent, as it was plain that this was what the pursuing Saivas expected her to do.

Tam descended quietly, so as not to disturb the sleeping girl. He was about twenty feet from the ground when he noticed that a tree with large, oval, glistening leaves was growing beside the one to which he clung. Hanging to its limbs was a profusion of globular fruit, reddish brown in color and about the size of an orange.

With an exclamation of delight, he leaped across the narrow gap between the two trees, caught and swung himself up on a limb, and plucked one of the reddish brown globes. He tore it open, revealing a juicy white pulp that gave off a delightful aroma. It proved delicious and thirst-satisfying.

Gathering as many as he could carry tucked in the folds of his robe above his belt, he was about to return to the lofty nest when he heard voices. Peering down through the branches, he saw coming toward him a party of at least a dozen Zargs, following the plainly marked trail which he and Nina had left in the soft leaf mold. It was obvious that the Saivas, not trusting to their own hunting ability, had set the hairy primitives to scent them out.

Keeping the broad tree trunk between himself and the approaching Zargs, Tam hastily climbed up to the nest. Nina had awakened, and was sitting up arranging her tousled hair. She smiled up at him

as he stood on a broad limb about to step into the nest beside her. But the smile changed—froze to a look of horror. She screamed a warning at the top of her voice, but it came too late.

So occupied had Tam's thoughts been with the pursuing Zargs that he had failed to look above him as he climbed. And so it happened that he had not caught sight of a huge, marbled tree-cat, as large as a tiger, crouching on a limb above him.

His first intimation of his peril was when he heard the scream of Nina followed by the roar of the great cat, and felt the long claws of the ferocious feline sink into his back.

Thrown off his balance by the impact of the heavy body, he toppled and fell headlong.

On the ground a hundred feet below, the Zargs, who were looking up with grins of exultation on their faces, scattered in consternation as a huge bull-elephant trumpeted angrily and charged among them.

Read what happens when Lozong and the two tigers come on this scene, and the swift-moving and remarkable adventures that follow, in the October WEIRD TALES, on sale September 1st.

MOORS OF WRAN

By A. LLOYD BAYNE

I smell Blood and Death tonight
On the Moors of Wran,
On the Moors of Wran,
And o'er the plain stalks the dread of man,
'Tis the fear of Pan
And the laugh of Pan.
Terror shall strike while the night is young,
And the souls of the lost that in space are hung
Tonight toward Earth will be awfully flung,
And the shrieks of the Damned will quiver.

Blood will bubble and flow tonight
On the Moors of Wran,
On the Moors of Wran,
And dreadful Things will be shown to man,
'Tis the face of Pan
And the hoofs of Pan.
Fear will burn in the hearts of all,
And Death descend like a ghostly pall:
The Dance of Life's on a spinning ball,
And corpses float in the river.

The Bridge of Sighs

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

A brief tale of mediaeval Venice, and the dark arts of Messer Sorrati the magician

THERE was a soft padding in the corridor without. Messer Lombruno raised his head to stare at the curtains cutting him off from the corridor. A lackey entered on silent feet. He bowed and addressed Messer Lombruno in a voice so low that his master must perforce bend forward to hear.

"The bearded man has come again, Messer."

"Allow him to enter at once."

The curtains fell together as the lackey retired. Messer Lombruno rolled up the parchment he had been reading and pressed a button on the table. A panel swung open. He placed the parchment in the receptacle disclosed and snapped the panel to. He sat quite still and waited.

A moment passed, and another. Then the draperies parted and the bearded man entered. He drew off his cloak and cast it over a chair. He sat down near Messer Lombruno, smiling enigmatically.

Messer Lombruno spoke. "How progress our plans?"

"They could progress no better," the other answered.

There was a dubious smile on the face of Messer Lombruno; his eyelids descended to veil his eyes. He leaned forward. "It is well. But when shall they culminate—our plans?"

"It is to be hoped, soon. A matter of hours."

"Has a night been set for the deed, then?"

The bearded man nodded. "Tomorrow, Messer Lombruno. Tomorrow night. The Doge has proclaimed a great celebration on the morrow. In the evening there will be a gorgeous parade. Though it is not an occasion for so doing, the Doge will lead a magnificent procession in the Bucentaur. Numberless gondolas and barges will follow the ship of state. The procession will progress twice the main canal, through a mapped schedule of side canals, and to the Lido. From there the Doge will return and go to the Bridge of Sighs, there to witness the execution of the great assassin, Bourni. After this execution the Doge will lead a column through the prison and over the bridge. When he reaches the other side of the bridge he is to be assassinated. The column moves in this way: the Doge at the head; two bodyguards, who will be disposed of, follow; then comes the assassin, a hireling who will pose as a lackey of mine, and succeeding him come you and I. The assassin is to strike the Doge with a long-bladed stiletto. At once after this, you and I are to rush up and make a great pretense of securing him, but we are in reality to aid his escape. That is to be done in this manner. There are many side passages at the chosen spot of the assassination. We will grapple with the murderer in one of these; he will elude us and, while we bluster about and block the passage, he will make good his escape. What think you of it, Messer Lombruno?"

"An excellent plot, Messer Doromo. You are certain that it is confined to those who are in it?"

"Certain. I would stake my estate on it!"

"That is well. I asked, Messer, for should a point miscarry and the plot be

unearthed, you and I, who lead this thing, should suffer most."

A smile crossed the face of Messer Doromo. He bent forward and looked into the eyes of Messer Lombruno. "There is nothing to fear. I have looked well to this."

The eyes of Messer Lombruno did not waver. "You have another plan?" he asked.

"I have. Good as the plan of our hireling is, I have one still better. The hired assassin is secondary; he will not fail, if our first plan does. But I place great store in both."

Messer Lombruno nodded impatiently. "It is to be hoped. Relate the better plan."

"You know of the magician, Messer Sorrati?"

A frown marred the brow of Messer Lombruno; he nodded. There was a slight flicker of his eyelids.

"It was he who gave me aid to send the well-guarded Messer Derigo to his death.

"And Messer Spani, if I fail not in memory," added Messer Lombruno.

Messer Doromo nodded eagerly. "He has not failed me once. I have paid him many ducats, and I have his promise that the Doge will drown. It will be an accident, he says, and none will suspect. It will occur, too, before the knife of the assassin strikes the Doge. I know not how it is to happen, but I am certain that it will. I have most faith in Messer Sorrati; for Satan fails him not. Come, tell me, is that not better than the plan of the assassin?"

Messer Lombruno pursed his lips. "Messer Sorrati knows of my connection?"

Messer Doromo nodded.

"You have told him, then?"

"He would know the composition of the conspiracy. I could do naught but tell him." Messer Doromo shrugged his shoulders. "It can not harm us, for he is not the man to pass his secrets on—they are too valuable to him."

Messer Lombruno eyed his white hands in silence. Then, "I like not this plan, Messer. Perchance you know it not, but I am not in the pleasure of Messer Sorrati."

There was a silence. Messer Doromo shifted his position. Messer Lombruno stared unseeingly at the deep purple cloak thrown carelessly across the chair near Messer Doromo. He suffered vague misgivings about the morrow.

"What matters that?" said Messer Doromo at last. "I have most faith in the magician. He will not fail. And if he does, there is always the assassin."

"I fear not that Messer Sorrati will fail. I fear instead that he may do this thing too well. It is best to be watchful."

"You are afraid of the dark, Messer Lombruno. Such fears reflect upon you."

Messer Lombruno leaned forward. "Forget it not, Messer, the man is paid. And he loves me not."

Messer Doromo shrugged his shoulders and, turning about, stared at the hour-glass. He looked back at Messer Lombruno. "What is the hour, Messer?"

"It is close upon midnight."

"Then I must make haste and depart, for I am to see the assassin at that hour."

He rose, threw his cloak about him, and moved toward the curtains. He hesitated a space, then turned.

"I shall call for you at an early hour on the morrow, Messer Lombruno. It is arranged that we are to follow the Doge about all day, to prevent any attempt at substitution, which is not impossible."

The curtains swished; he was gone, and Messer Lombruno was alone. He pulled the bracket of flambeaux toward him and slowly, methodically blew out the dancing flames.

THERE was a sharp rap upon the panel of the outer door of the house of Messer Lombruno. A lackey came and admitted Messer Doromo.

"You are early, Messer," said Messer Lombruno.

"One must be early." He spoke rapidly and in a low tone, as if he feared that he might be overheard. "Are you prepared?"

"Yes. Is all in readiness for the deed?"

"All. I saw to that, Messer Lombruno."

"It is well. Come, let us go. You have secured a gondola and the services of a gondolier for the day?" Messer Lombruno halted as the thought struck him.

"All is done," answered Messer Doromo impatiently.

The two men picked their way through the narrow byway to the water's edge. They stepped into the gondola and were poled out into the canal. In a short space, they swung into the procession of gondolas behind the ship of state.

Thus far all had happened as expected. The magnificent Bucentaur, after returning from the Lido, had stopped at the prison as per schedule; the execution of Bourni had taken place; and the Doge was now leading a column of followers through the prison. He approached the Bridge of Sighs all unaware of the plot against his life. His bodyguards followed. The heat was oppressive, and they were lax. The assassin nervously fingered his stiletto, and wondered whether or not he would escape the avengers of the Doge. Messer Doromo appeared perfectly at ease, but Messer Lombruno's eyes shifted continually from side to side. There was an understanding between the three in the conspiracy that Messer Sorrati had failed them.

The Doge stepped upon the bridge. He passed over the great trap in the center. His bodyguards followed. The assassin came, his hand already clasped about the hilt of his weapon. The Doge passed over.

The fatal spot was reached. The Doge walked slowly; the bodyguards appeared to examine the walls. Messer Doromo and Messer Lombruno watched with bated breath. The assassin was prepared to strike.

Suddenly there was a great shout from the people yet behind on the bridge. The assassin, the bodyguards, the Doge—all turned. They looked to the spot where Messer Doromo and Messer Lombruno should have been. In the space hung a black cloud, slowly dissolving into shadowy mist. But the trap stood open; it had been sprung under the combined weight of Messer Doromo and Messer Lombruno, and they had been plunged into the deep, cold water below.

IT WAS proclaimed next day. Two faithful followers of the Doge, Messer Doromo and Messer Lombruno, had been drowned because of the accidental springing of the trap of the Bridge of Sighs. There was some comment on this thing, and the trap was closely examined, but nothing was found.

It was not for many days that it was reported that an ally urchin, peering through a crack in a drawn curtain in the house of Messer Sorrati, saw the magician dancing in high glee about a miniature of the Bridge of Sighs. There were two curiously contorted figures suspended from the trap in the center of the bridge. And when the story found its way about, there was no one who gave credence to it.

A Brief Story of the Iron Maiden

HIS BROTHER'S KEEPER

By MAJOR GEORGE FIELDING ELIOT

JOHN DANGERFIELD was in love with his brother's fiancée—a position whose difficulties were somewhat ameliorated by the fact that from early childhood he had been accustomed to take away from his brother Horace any of Horace's possessions that he fancied; and oddly enough, he had always fancied what Horace cherished most.

Now he fancied Leslie Monroe—and that blond young lady was by no means unconscious of the fact. Nor was she unconscious of the difference between being the wife of a younger son, a mere pensioner, and being the wife to the heir of Cragmore.

She stood now by John's side in a dusty room on the third story of an old brick warehouse, listening to the chatter of a gray little man in a skull-cap. The room was filled with odds and ends of every description, over which the gray little man waxed eloquent.

"This armor is really remarkable," the gray little man was saying. "But if you aren't interested in that, Mr. Dangerfield, here's something that will strike your fancy. It's the queerest thing I've had here for many a day; I found it in Nuremberg, and I've had it restored and put in good order."

He had paused before an object that looked like an up-ended sarcophagus. It was a little taller than a full-grown man, and entirely of iron. On its front it bore a bas-relief of a female figure; it was perhaps three feet wide, and twice as deep.

"Looks like a deep coffin stood on end," John Dangerfield remarked.

"Right!" the dealer replied. "Look here!"

He swung the back of the thing out on heavy hinges, like a door. At the bottom of this door was a stout shelf of iron; above this was fitted an assortment of iron bands, hinged and provided with locks. The dealer flashed the ray of a pocket torch into the dark interior; protruding back from its forward wall Leslie and Dangerfield saw six long, tapering iron spikes, glittering and sharp.

"This," the gray little man gloated, "is a genuine Iron Maiden! It is four hundred years old—built especially to the order of Duke Otho of Franconia. That whole front is movable; moves back into the box at the rate of about a half-inch every ten minutes; propelled by steel springs of incredible power. You put your victim against this door, standing on the shelf, and fasten him tight with the iron bands. The man can't move a muscle when they're all locked. Then you swing the door shut—so—putting your victim facing the spikes; a touch on this lever releases the mechanism, and the spikes move toward him. They're over a foot away to start with; gives him plenty of time to think over his sins! Note the spikes—the two bottom ones are the longest, and are supposed to pierce the groin or lower abdomen; then when they are well embedded, the next two pierce the shoulders; finally the

last two pierce the poor devil's eyes, reach his brain at last and put him out of his misery. I fancy the whole process takes about six hours, from the time the machinery commences to move until the victim is dead."

"What a horrible, dreadful thing, John!" Leslie Monroe exclaimed. "Please take me away—I can't bear to look at it."

"Just as you say, dear," John Dangerfield answered tenderly. "We'll be going now, Nathan; I may be back to see you later."

"Monday, if you please, Mr. Dangerfield," the little gray man answered. "It's Saturday afternoon, sir; I'm closing up."

He opened the door leading to the dark landing. The man who had been so patiently waiting there in the shadows struck one savage blow and lowered the limp body of the dealer gently to the floor.

"What's the matter, Nathan?" John Dangerfield asked, hearing the thud of the blow. There was no answer; John in his turn stepped out upon the landing, and again the watcher in the shadows struck. The blackjack did its work well; John Dangerfield collapsed in a crumpled heap beside the dealer. The man who had struck him down stepped over his body into the storeroom to confront Leslie Monroe.

"Why, Horace!" she cried. "What are you——"

Then the light from the window fell full upon his face—his eyes—and Leslie Monroe fainted.

Horace Dangerfield laughed; the cunning, triumphant laugh of a madman.

"I've waited long," he muttered. "Too long—nothing has been adequate before. But this—this will do. This will satisfy me."

When John Dangerfield came to himself, he was in dust-filled darkness. He could not move, something was choking him——

Something was an iron collar, locked tight about his neck—his forehead was held back by an iron band—his wrists and ankles were in manacles—there was a dreadful clanking sound somewhere in the gloom.

Warm against his breast he felt living flesh—he realized that Leslie Monroe was there, bound tightly to him by straps or ropes: he spoke her name, but she did not answer.

The truth leaped upon John Dangerfield like a pouncing tiger. He was locked in the Iron Maiden, with Leslie Monroe bound before him so that the spikes would reach her first! He raised his voice:

"Help! Help!"

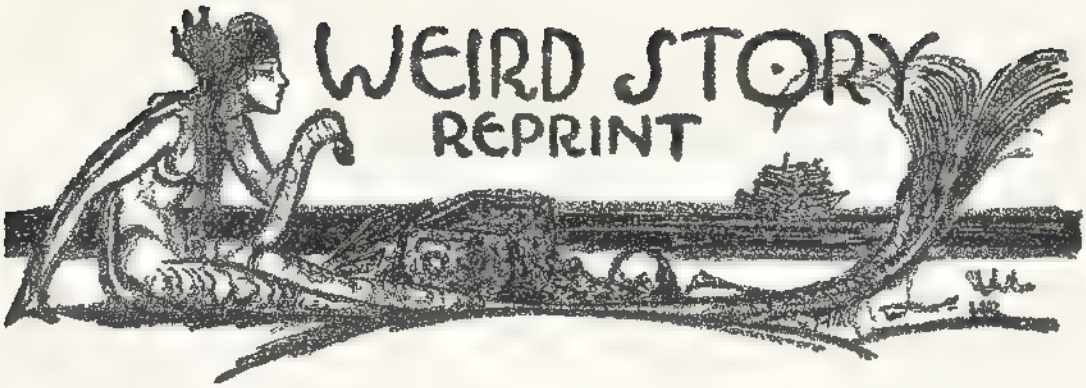
The words reverberated mockingly in that iron tomb; even more mockingly a voice from without answered.

"Cry again, John! There is no one to hear—save the Iron Maiden! I was listening last night when you told Leslie you wanted to be with her even in death; you have your wish. Good-bye, John!"

"Horace, for the love of God——"

But only the sound of retreating feet and the slamming of a door answered. The machinery clanked again; and the first cruel touch of steel points revived the swooning Leslie.

The gloomy room rang with a woman's screams.



The Wolf-Leader*

By Alexandre Dumas

CHAPTER 4

The Black Wolf

THIBAULT'S first thought was to get himself some supper, for he was terribly tired. The past day had been an eventful one for him, and certain things which had happened to him had evidently been calculated to produce a craving for food. The supper, it must be said, was not quite such a savory one as he had promised himself, when starting to kill the buck; but the animal, as we know, had not been killed by Thibault, and the ferocious hunger which now consumed him made his black bread taste almost as delicious as venison.

He had hardly, however, begun his frugal repast, when he became conscious that his goat—of which I think we have already spoken—was uttering the most plaintive bleatings. Thinking that she, too, was in want of her supper, he went into the lean-to for some fresh grass, which he then carried to her, but as he opened the little door of the shed, out she rushed with such precipitancy that she nearly knocked Thibault over, and without stopping to take the provender he had brought her, ran toward the house. Thibault threw down the bundle of grass and went after her, with the intention of re-installing her in her proper place; but he found that this was more than he was able to do. He had to use all his force to get her along; for the goat, with all the strength of which a beast of her kind is capable, resisted all his efforts to drag her back by the horns, arching her back, and stubbornly refusing to move. At last, however, being vanquished in the struggle, it ended by the goat being once more shut up in her shed, but, in spite of the plentiful supper which Thibault left her with, she continued to utter the most lamentable cries.

Perplexed, and cross at the same time, the shoemaker again rose from his supper and went to the shed, this time opening the door so cautiously that the goat could not escape. Once inside he began feeling about with his hands in all the nooks and corners to try and discover the cause of her alarm. Suddenly his fingers came in contact with the warm, thick coat of some other animal. Thibault was not a coward, far from it; none the less he drew back hastily.

*This remarkable werewolf novel by Alexandre Dumas, *fils*, is not included in the published collections of Dumas' works in English, and will therefore be new to our readers, except those who have had the good fortune to read the story in the original French.

This story began in WEIRD TALES for August

He returned to the house and got a light, but it almost fell from his hand, when, on re-entering the shed, he recognized in the animal that had so frightened the goat, the buck of the Lord of Vez; the same buck that he had followed, had failed to kill, that he had prayed for in the devil's name, if he could not have it in God's; the same that had thrown the hounds out; the very same in short which had cost him such hard blows. Thibault, after assuring himself that the door was fastened, went gently up to the animal; the poor thing was either so tired, or so tame, that it did not make the slightest attempt to move, but merely gazed out at Thibault with its large dark velvety eyes, rendered more appealing than ever by the fear which agitated it.

"I must have left the door open," muttered the shoemaker to himself, "and the creature, not knowing where to hide itself, must have taken refuge here." But on thinking further over the matter, it came back to him that when he had gone to open the door, only ten minutes before, for the first time, he had found the wooden bolt pushed so firmly into the staple that he had had to get a stone to hammer it back; and then, besides, the goat, which, as we have seen, did not at all relish the society of the newcomer, would certainly have run out of the shed before, if the door had been open. What was, however, still more surprizing was that Thibault, looking more closely at the buck, saw that it had been fastened up to the rack by a cord.

Thibault, as we have said, was no coward, but now a cold sweat began to break out in large drops on his brow, a curious kind of a shiver ran through his body, and his teeth chattered violently. He went out of the shed, shutting the door after him, and began looking for his goat, which had taken advantage of the moment when the shoemaker had gone to fetch a light, and ran again into the house, where she was now lying beside the hearth, having evidently quite made up her mind this time not to forsake a resting-place which, for that night at least, she found preferable to her usual abode.

Thibault had a perfect remembrance of the unholy invocation he had addressed to Satan, and although his prayer had been miraculously answered, he still could not bring himself to believe that there was any diabolic intervention in the matter.

As the idea, however, of being under the protection of the spirit of darkness filled him with an instinctive fear, he tried to pray; but when he wished to raise his hand to make the sign of the cross on his forehead, his arm refused to bend, and although up to that time he had never missed a day saying his *Ave Maria,* he could not remember a single word of it.

These fruitless efforts were accompanied by a terrible turmoil in poor Thibault's brain; evil thoughts came rushing in upon him, and he seemed to hear them whispering all around him, as one hears the murmur of the rising tide, or the laughing of the winter wind through the leafless branches of the trees.

"After all," he muttered to himself, as he sat pale, and staring before him, "the buck is a fine windfall, whether it comes from God or the Devil, and I should be a fool not to profit by it. If I am afraid of it as being food sent from the nether regions, I am in no way forced to eat it, and what is more, I could not eat it alone, and if I asked any one to partake of it with me, I should be betrayed; the best thing I can do is to take the live beast over to the Nunnery of Saint-Rémy, where it will serve as a pet for the nuns and where the abbess will give me a good round sum for it. The atmosphere of that

holy place will drive the evil out of it, and I shall run no risk to my soul in taking a handful of consecrated crown pieces.

"What days of sweating over my work, and turning my auger, it would take, to earn even the quarter of what I shall get by just leading the beast to its new fold! The devil who helps one is certainly better worth than the angel who forsakes one. If my lord Satan wants to go too far with me, it will then be time enough to free myself from his claws: bless me! I am not a child, nor a young lamb like Georgine, and I am able to walk straight in front of me and go where I like." He had forgotten, unhappy man, as he boasted of being able to go where and how he liked, that only five minutes before he had tried in vain to lift his hand to his head.

Thibault had such convincing and excellent reasons ready to hand, that he quite made up his mind to keep the buck, come whence it might, and even went so far as to decide that the money he received for it should be devoted to buying a wedding dress for his betrothed. For, strange to say, by some freak of memory, his thoughts would keep returning toward Agnelette; and he seemed to see her clad in a long white dress with a crown of white lilies on her head and a long veil. If, he said to himself, he could have such a charming guardian angel in his house, no devil, however strong and cunning he might be, would ever dare to cross the threshold. "So," he went on, "there is always that remedy at hand, and if my lord Satan begins to be too troublesome, I shall be off to the grandmother to ask for Agnelette; I shall marry her, and if I can not remember my prayers or am unable to make the sign of the cross, there will be a dear pretty little woman, who has had no traffic with Satan, who will do all that sort of thing for me."

Having more or less reassured himself with the idea of this compromise, Thibault, in order that the buck should not run down in value, and might be as fine an animal as possible to offer to the holy ladies, to whom he calculated to sell it, went and filled the rack with fodder and looked to see that the litter was soft and thick enough for the buck to rest fully at its ease. The remainder of the night passed without further incident, and without even a bad dream.

The next morning, my lord Baron again went hunting, but this time it was not a timid deer that headed the hounds, but the wolf which Marcotte had tracked the day before and had again that morning traced to his lair.

And this wolf was a genuine wolf, and no mistake; it must have seen many and many a year, although those who had that morning caught sight of it while on its track, had noted with astonishment that it was black all over. Black or gray, however, it was a bold and enterprising beast, and promised some rough work to the Baron and his huntsmen. First started near Vertefeuille, in the Dargent covert, it had made over the plain of Meutard, leaving Fleury and Dampleux to the left, crossed the road to Ferté-Milou, and finally begun to run cunning in the Ivors coppices. Then, instead of continuing in the same direction, it doubled, returning along the same track it had come, and so exactly retracing its own steps, that the Baron, as he galloped along, could actually distinguish the prints left by his horse's hoofs that same morning.

Back again in the district of Bourg-Fontaine, he ranged the country, leading the hunt right to the very spot where the misadventures of the previous day had had their start, the vicinity of the shoemaker's hut.

Thibault, we know, had made up his

mind what to do in regard to certain matters, and as he intended going over to see Agnelette in the evening, he had started work early.

You will naturally ask why, instead of sitting down to a work which brought in so little, as he himself acknowledged, Thibault did not start off at once to take his buck to the ladies of Saint-Rémy. Thibault took very good care to do nothing of the sort; the day was not the time to be leading a buck through the forest of Villers-Cotterets; the first keeper he met would have stopped him, and what explanation could he have given? No, Thibault had arranged in his own mind to leave home one evening about dusk, to follow the road to the right, then go down the sandpit lane which led into the Chemin du Pendu, and he would then be on the common of Saint-Rémy, only a hundred paces or so from the convent.

Thibault no sooner caught the first sound of the horn and the dogs, than he immediately gathered together a huge bundle of dried heather, which he hastily piled up in front of the shed, where his prisoner was confined, so as to hide the door, in case the huntsmen and their master should halt in front of his hut, as they had the day before. He then sat down again to his work, applying to it an energy unknown even to himself before, bending over the shoe he was making with an intentness which prevented him from even lifting his eyes. All at once he thought he detected a sound like something scratching at the door; he was just going through from his lean-to to open it when the door fell back, and to Thibault's great astonishment an immense black wolf entered the room, walking on its hind legs. On reaching the middle of the floor, it sat down after the fashion of wolves, and looked hard and fixedly at the sabot-maker.

Thibault seized a hatchet which was within reach, and in order to give a fit reception to his strange visitor, and to terrify him, he flourished the weapon above his head.

A curious mocking expression passed over the face of the wolf, and then it began to laugh.

It was the first time that Thibault had ever heard a wolf laugh. He had often heard tell that wolves barked like dogs, but never that they laughed like human beings. And what a laugh it was! If a man had laughed such a laugh, Thibault would have been scared out of his wits.

He brought his lifted arm down again.

"By my lord of the cloven foot," said the wolf, in a full and sonorous voice, "you are a fine fellow! At your request, I send you the finest buck from His Royal Highness's forests, and in return, you want to split my head open with your hatchet; human gratitude is worthy to rank with that of wolves."

On hearing a voice exactly like his own coming forth from a beast's mouth, Thibault's knees began to shake under him, and the hatchet fell out of his hand.

"Now then," continued the wolf, "let us be sensible and talk together like two good friends. Yesterday you wanted the Baron's buck, and I led it myself into your shed, and for fear it should escape, I tied it up myself to the rack. And for all this you take your hatchet to me!"

"How should I know who you were?" asked Thibault.

"I see, you did not recognize me! A nice sort of excuse to give."

"Well, I ask you, was it likely I should take you for a friend under that ugly coat?"

"Ugly coat, indeed!" said the wolf, licking his fur with a long tongue as red as blood. "Confound you! You are hard to please. However, it's not a matter of my coat; what I want to know is, are you

willing to make me some return for the service I have done you?"

"Certainly," said the shoemaker, feeling rather uncomfortable, "but I ought to know what your demands are. What is it? What do you want? Speak!"

"First of all, and above all things, I should like a glass of water; for those confounded dogs have run me until I am out of breath."

"You shall have it in a moment, my lord wolf."

And Thibault ran and fetched a bowl of fresh, clear water from a brook which ran some ten paces from the hut. The eager readiness with which he complied with the wolf's request betrayed his feeling of relief at getting out of the bargain so cheaply.

As he placed the bowl in front of the wolf, he made the animal a low bow. The wolf lapped up the contents with evident delight, and then stretched himself on the floor with his paws straight out in front of him, looking like a sphinx.

"Now," he said, "listen to me."

"There is something else you wish me to do?" asked Thibault, inwardly quaking.

"Yes, a very urgent something," replied the wolf. "Do you hear the baying of the dogs?"

"Indeed I do; they are coming nearer and nearer, and in five minutes they will be here."

"And what I want you to do is to get me out of their way."

"Get you out of their way! and how?" cried Thibault, who but too well remembered what it had cost him to meddle with the Baron's hunting the day before.

"Look about you, think, invent some way of delivering me!"

"The Baron's dogs are rough customers to deal with, and you are asking neither more nor less than that I should save your life; for I warn you, if they once get hold of you, and they will probably scent you out, they will make short work of pulling you to pieces. And now supposing I spare you this disagreeable business," continued Thibault, who imagined that he had now got the upper hand, "what will you do for me in return?"

"Do for you in return?" said the wolf, "and how about the buck?"

"And how about the bowl of water?" said Thibault. "We are quits there, my good sir. Let us start a fresh business altogether; if you are agreeable to it, I am quite willing."

"Let it be so, then; tell me quickly what you want of me."

"There are folks," proceeded Thibault, "who might take advantage of the position you are now in, and ask for all kinds of extravagant things, riches, power, titles, and what not, but I am not going to do anything of the kind; yesterday I wanted the buck, and you gave it me, it is true; tomorrow, I shall want something else. For some time past I have been possessed by a kind of mania, and I do nothing but wish first for one thing and then for another, and you will not always be able to spare time to listen to my demands. So what I ask for is, that, as you are the devil in person or some one very like it, you will grant me the fulfilment of every wish I may have from this day forth."

The wolf put on a mocking expression of countenance. "Is that all?" he said, "Your peroration does not accord very well with your exordium."

"Oh!" continued Thibault, "my wishes are honest and moderate ones, and such as become a poor peasant like myself. I want just a little corner of ground, and a few timbers, and planks; that's all that a man of my sort can possibly desire."

"I should have the greatest pleasure in doing what you ask," said the wolf, "but it is simply impossible, you know."

"Then I am afraid you must make up your mind to put up with what the dogs may do to you."

"You think so, and you suppose I have need of your help, and so you can ask what you please?"

"I do not suppose it, I am sure of it."

"Indeed! well then, look."

"Look where," asked Thibault.

"Look at the spot where I was," said the wolf.

Thibault drew back in horror. The place where the wolf had been lying was empty; the wolf had disappeared, where or how it was impossible to say. The room was intact, there was not a hole in the roof large enough to let a needle through, nor a crack in the floor through which a drop of water could have filtered.

"Well, do you still think that I require your assistance to get out of trouble?" said the wolf.

"Where the devil are you?"

"If you put a question to me in my real name," said the wolf with a sneer in his voice, "I shall be obliged to answer you. I am still in the same place."

"But I can no longer see you!"

"Simply because I am invisible."

"But the dogs, the huntsmen, the Baron, will come in here after you?"

"No doubt they will, but they will not find me."

"But if they do not find you, they will set upon me."

"As they did yesterday; only yesterday you were sentenced to thirty-six strokes of the strap, for having carried off the buck; today, you will be sentenced to seventy-two, for having hidden the wolf, and Agnelette will not be on the spot to buy you off with a kiss."

"Phew! what am I to do?"

"Let the buck loose; the dogs will mistake the scent, and they will get the blows instead of you."

"But is it likely such trained hounds will follow the scent of a deer in mistake for that of a wolf?"

"You can leave that to me," replied the voice, "only do not lose any time, or the dogs will be here before you have reached the shed, and that would make matters unpleasant, not for me, whom they would not find, but for you, whom they would."

Thibault did not wait to be warned a second time, but was off like a shot to the shed. He unfastened the buck, which, as if propelled by some hidden force, leapt from the house, ran round it, crossing the track of the wolf, and plunged into the Baisemont coppice. The dogs were within a hundred paces of the hut; Thibault heard them with trepidation; the whole pack came full force against the door, one hound after the other.

Then, all at once, two or three gave cry and went off in the direction of Baisemont, the rest of the hounds after them.

The dogs were on the wrong scent; they were on the scent of the buck, and had abandoned that of the wolf.

Thibault gave a deep sigh of relief; he watched the hunt gradually disappearing in the distance, and went back to his room to the full and joyous notes of the Baron's horn.

He found the wolf lying composedly on the same spot as before, but how it had found its way in again was quite as impossible to discover as how it had found its way out.

CHAPTER 5

The Pact With Satan

THIBAULT stopped short on the threshold, overcome with astonishment at this re-apparition. "I was saying," began the wolf, as if nothing had happened to interrupt the conversation, "that it is out of my power to grant you the accomplishment of all the wishes you may have in future for your own comfort and advancement."

"Then I am to expect nothing from you?"

"Not so, for the ill you wish your neighbor can be carried out with my help."

"And, pray, what good would that do me personally?"

"You fool! has not a moralist said, 'There is always something sweet to us in the misfortune of our friends, even the dearest'?"

"Was it a wolf said that? I did not know wolves could boast of moralists among their number."

"No, it was not a wolf, it was a man."

"And was the man hanged?"

"On the contrary, he was made Governor of part of Poitou; there are, to be sure, a good many wolves in that province —well then, if there is something pleasant in the misfortune of our best friend, can you not understand what a subject of rejoicing the misfortune of our worst enemy must be?"

"There is some truth in that, certainly," said Thibault.

"Without taking into consideration that there is always an opportunity of profiting by our neighbor's calamity, whether he be friend or foe."

Thibault paused for a minute or two to consider before he answered:

"By my faith, you are right there, friend wolf. And suppose, then, you do me this service, what shall you expect in exchange? I suppose it will have to be a case of give and take, eh?"

"Certainly. Every time that you express a wish that is not to your own immediate advantage, you will have to repay me with a small portion of your person."

Thibault drew back with an exclamation of fear.

"Oh! do not be alarmed! I shall not demand a pound of flesh, as a certain Jew of my acquaintance did from his debtor."

"What is it then you ask of me?"

"For the fulfilment of your first wish, one of your hairs; two hairs for the second wish, four for the third, and so on, doubling the number each time."

Thibault broke into a laugh: "If that is all you require, Master Wolf, I accept on the spot; and I shall try to start with such a comprehensive wish, that I shall never need to wear a wig. So let it be agreed between us!" and Thibault held out his hand. The black wolf lifted his paw, but he kept it raised.

"Well?" said Thibault.

"I was only thinking," replied the wolf, "that I have rather sharp claws, and, without wishing to do so, I might hurt you badly; but I see a way whereby to clinch the bargain without any damage done to you. You have a silver ring, I have a gold one; let us exchange; the barter will be to your advantage, as you see." And the wolf held out its paw. Thibault saw a ring of the purest gold shining under the fur of what corresponded to the ring finger, and accepted the bargain without hesitation; the respective rings then changed ownership.

"Good!" said the wolf, "now we two are married."

"You mean betrothed, Master Wolf," put in Thibault. "Plague upon you! you go too fast."

"We shall see about that, Master Thibault. And now you go back to your work, and I'll go back to mine."

"Good-bye, my lord wolf."

"Till we meet again, Master Thibault."

The wolf had hardly uttered these last words, on which it had laid an unmistakable emphasis, ere it disappeared like a pinch of lighted gunpowder, and like the gunpowder, left behind a strong smell of sulfur.

THIBAULT again stood for a moment dumfounded. He had not yet grown accustomed to this manner of making one's exit; he looked round him on every side, but the wolf was not there.

At first he thought the whole thing must have been a dream, but, looking down, he saw the devil's ring, on the third finger of his right hand; he drew it off and examined it. He saw a monogram engraved on the inner side, and looking more closely, perceived that it was formed of two letters, T. and S.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, in a cold sweat, "Thibault and Satan, the family names of the two contracting parties. So much the worse for me! but when one gives oneself to the devil, one has to do it without reserve."

And Thibault began humming a song, trying to drown his thoughts, but his voice filled him with fear, for there was a new and curious sound in it, even to his own ears. So he fell silent, and went back to his work as a distraction.

He had only just begun, however, to shape his wooden shoe, when, some distance off, from the direction of Baisemont, he again heard the baying of the hounds, and the notes of the Baron's horn. Thibault left off working to listen to these various sounds.

"Ah, my fine lord, you may chase your wolf as long as you like; but I can tell you, you won't get this one's paw to nail up over the door of your castle. What a lucky beggar I am! Here am I, almost as good as a magician, and while you ride on, suspecting nothing, my brave dispenser of blows, I have but to say the word, and a spell will be cast over you whereby I shall be amply avenged." And in thinking thus, Thibault suddenly paused.

"And, after all," he went on, "why shouldn't I revenge myself on this damned Baron and Master Marcotte? Pshaw! with only a hair at stake I may well gratify myself on this score." And so saying Thibault passed his hand through the thick, silky hair which covered his head like a lion's mane.

"I shall have plenty of hairs left to lose," he continued. "Why bother about one? And, besides, it will be an opportunity for seeing whether my friend the devil has been playing false with me or not. Very well, then: I wish a serious accident to befall the Baron, and as for that good-for-nothing of a Marcotte, who laid on to me so roughly yesterday, it is only fair that something as bad again should happen to him."

While expressing this double wish, Thibault felt anxious and agitated to the last degree; for in spite of what he had already seen of the wolf's power, he still feared the Devil might only have been playing on his credulity. After uttering his wish, he tried in vain to return to his work, he took hold of his parer, wrong side up, and took the skin off his fingers, and still going on with his paring he spoilt a pair of shoes worth a good twelve sous. As he was lamenting over this misfortune, and wiping the blood off his hand, he heard a great commotion in the direction of the valley; he ran into the Chrétiennelle road and saw a number of men walking slowly two and two in his direction. These men were the prickers and kennelmen of the Lord of Vez. The road they were traversing was about two miles long, so that it was some time before Thibault could distinguish what the men were doing, who were walking as slowly and solemnly as if forming part of a funeral procession. When, however, they got to within five hundred paces of him, he saw that they were carrying two rough litters, on which were stretched two lifeless bodies, those of the Baron and of Marcotte. A cold sweat broke out over

Thibault's forehead. "Ah!" he exclaimed, "what do I see here?"

What had happened was this:

Thibault's expedient for putting the dogs on the wrong scent had succeeded, and all had gone well as long as the buck remained in covert; but it doubled, when near Marolle, and while crossing the heath passed within ten paces of the Baron. The latter thought at first that the animal had been startled by hearing the hounds, and was trying to hide itself.

But at that moment, not more than a hundred paces behind him, the whole pack of hounds appeared, forty dogs, running, yelping, yelling, crying, some in a deep bass like great cathedral bells, others with the full sound of a gong, and again others in a falsetto key, like clarionettes out of tune, all giving cry at the top of their voices, as eagerly and merrily as if they had never followed the scent of any other beast.

Then the Baron gave way to one of his wild fits of rage, fits only worthy of Polichinelle tearing a passion to tatters in a puppet-show. He did not shout, he yelled; he did not swear, he cursed. Not satisfied with lashing his dogs, he rode them down, trampling them beneath his horse's hoofs, flinging himself about in his saddle like a devil in a stoup of holy water.

All his maledictions were hurled at his chief pricker, whom he held responsible for the stupid blunder that had occurred. This time Marcotte had not a word to say either in explanation or excuse, and the poor man was terribly ashamed of the mistake his hounds had made, and mighty uneasy at the towering passion into which it had thrown my lord. He made up his mind therefore to do everything in the power of man, if possible more, to repair the one and calm the other, and so started off at full gallop, dashing among the trees and over the brushwood, crying out at the top of his voice, while he slashed right and left with such vigor that every stroke of his whip cut into the flesh of the poor animals. "Back, dogs! back!" But in vain he rode, and whipped, and called aloud; the dogs only seemed to become more wildly anxious to follow up the new-found scent, as if they recognized the buck of the day before, and were determined that their wounded self-esteem should have its revenge.

Then Marcotte grew desperate, and determined on the only course that seemed left. The river Ourcq was close by, the dogs were already on the point of crossing the water, and the one chance of breaking up the pack was to get across himself and whip back the dogs as they began to climb the opposite bank. He spurred his horse in the direction of the river, and leaped with it into the very middle of the stream, both horse and rider arriving safely in the water; but, unfortunately, as we have already mentioned, the river just at this time was terribly swollen with the rains, the horse was unable to stand against the violence of the current, and after being swept round two or three times finally disappeared. Seeing that it was useless trying to save his horse, Marcotte endeavored to disengage himself, but his feet were so firmly fixed in the stirrups that he could not draw them out, and three seconds after his horse had disappeared, Marcotte himself was no longer to be seen.

Meanwhile, the Baron, with the remainder of the huntsmen, had ridden up to the water's edge, and his anger was in an instant converted into grief and alarm as soon as he became aware of the perilous situation of his pricker; for the Lord of Vez had a sincere love toward those who ministered to his pleasure, whether man or beast. In a loud voice he shouted to his

followers: "By all the powers of hell! Save Marcotte! Five and twenty louis, fifty louis, a hundred louis, to any one who will save him!" And men and horses, like so many startled frogs, leaped into the water, vying with each other who should be first. The Baron was for riding into the river himself, but his henchmen held him back, and so anxious were they to prevent the worthy Baron from carrying out his heroic intention, that their affection for their master was fatal to the poor pricker. For one moment he was forgotten, but that last moment meant his death. He appeared once more above the surface, just where the river makes a bend; he was seen to battle against the water, and his face for an instant rose into view, as with one last cry he called to his hounds, "Back! dogs, back!" But the water again closed over him, stifling the last syllable of the last word, and it was not till a quarter of an hour later that his body was found lying on a little beach of sand on to which the current had washed him.

Marcotte was dead; there was no doubt about it! This accident was disastrous in its effect on the Lord of Vez. Being the noble lord he was, he had somewhat of a liking for good wine; and this predisposed him ever so little to apoplexy, and now, as he came face to face with the corpse of his good servitor, the emotion was so great that the blood rushed to his head and brought on a fit.

THIBAULT felt appalled as he realized with what scrupulous exactness the black wolf had fulfilled his part of the contract, and not without a shudder did he think of the right Master Isengrin now had to claim an equal punctuality of payment in return. He began to wonder uneasily whether the wolf, after all, was the kind of being that would continue to be satisfied with a few hairs—and this the more that both at the moment of his wish and during the succeeding minutes during which it was being accomplished, he had not been conscious of the slightest sensation anywhere about the roots of his hair, not even of the least little tickling. He was far from being pleasantly affected by the sight of poor Marcotte's corpse; he had not loved him, it was true, and he had felt that he had good reasons for not doing so; but his dislike to the defunct had never gone so far as to make him wish for his death, and the wolf had certainly gone far beyond his desires. At the same time, Thibault had never precisely said what he did wish, and had left the wolf a wide margin for the exercise of his malice; evidently he would have to be more careful in future in stating exactly what he wanted, and above all, more circumspect as regards any wish he might formulate.

As to the Baron, although still alive, he was almost as good as dead. From the moment when, as the result of Thibault's wish, he had been struck down as it were by lightning, he had remained unconscious. His men had laid him on the heap of heather which the shoemaker had piled up to hide the door of the shed, and troubled and frightened, were ransacking the place to try and find some restorative which might bring their master back to life. One asked for vinegar to put on his temples, another for a key to put down his back, this one for a bit of board to slap his hands with, that for some sulfur to burn under his nose. In the midst of all this confusion was heard the voice of little Engoulevent, calling out: "In the name of all that's good, we don't want all this truck, we want a goat. Ah! if only we had a goat!"

"A goat?" cried Thibault, who would have rejoiced to see the Baron recover, for it would lift at least part of the burden now weighing on his conscience, and would also rid his dwelling of these

marauders. "A goat? I have a goat!"

"Really! you have a goat?" cried Engoulevent. "Oh! my friends! now our dear master is saved!"

And so overcome with joy was he that he flung his arms round Thibault's neck, saying, "Bring out your goat, my friend! bring out your goat!"

Thibault went to the shed and led out the goat, which ran after him bleating.

"Hold it firmly by the horns," said the huntsman, "and lift up one of its front feet." And as he gave the word, the second huntsman drew from its sheath a little knife which he carried in his belt, and began carefully sharpening it on the grindstone which Thibault used for his tools. "What are you going to do?" asked the shoemaker, feeling somewhat uneasy about these preparations.

"What! don't you know," said Engoulevent, "that there is a little bone in the shape of a cross inside a goat's heart, which, if crushed into powder, is a sovereign remedy for apoplexy?"

"You intend to kill my goat?" exclaimed Thibault, at the same time leaving hold of the goat's horns, and dropping its foot. "But I will not have it killed."

"Fie, fie!" said Engoulevent, "that is not at all a becoming speech, Monsieur Thibault. Would you value the life of our good master as of no more worth than that of your wretched goat? I am truly ashamed for you."

"It's easy for you to talk. This goat is all I have to depend upon, the only thing I possess. She gives me milk, and I am fond of her."

"Ah! Monsieur Thibault, you can not be thinking of what you are saying—it is fortunate that the Baron does not hear you; for he would be broken-hearted to know that his precious life was being bargained for in that miserly way."

"And besides," said one of the prickers with a sneering laugh, "if Master Thibault values his goat at a price which he thinks only my lord can pay, there is nothing to prevent him coming to the castle of Vez to claim this payment. The account can be settled with what was left over as due to him yesterday."

Thibault knew that he could not get the better of these men, unless he again called the Devil to his aid; but he had just received such a lesson from Satan that there was no fear of his exposing himself, at all events for a second time the same day, to similar good offices. His one desire for the time being was not to wish any sort of ill to any one of those present.

One man dead, another nearly so—Thibault found this lesson enough. Consequently, he kept his eyes turned away from the menacing and jeering countenances around him, for fear of being aggravated beyond control. While his back was turned, the poor goat's throat was cut, her piteous cry alone informing him of the fact; and it was no sooner killed than its heart, which had hardly ceased throbbing, was opened in search of the little bone of which Engoulevent had spoken. This found, it was ground into powder, mixed with vinegar diluted with thirteen drops of gall from the bladder containing it, the whole stirred together in a glass with the cross of a rosary, and then poured gently down the Baron's throat, after his teeth had been forced apart with the blade of a dagger.

The effect of the draft was immediate and truly miraculous. The Lord of Vez sneezed, sat up, and said in a voice, intelligible though still a little husky: "Give me something to drink."

Engoulevent handed him some water in a wooden drinking-cup, a family possession, of which Thibault was very proud. But the Baron had no sooner put his lips to it and become aware of what the vile, abominable liquid was, which they had had the impudence to offer him,

than, with an exclamation of disgust, he flung the vessel and its contents violently against the wall, and the cup fell, smashed into a thousand pieces. Then in a loud and sonorous voice, which left no doubt of his perfect recovery, he called out: "Bring me some wine." One of the pickers mounted and rode at full speed to the castle of Oigny, and there requested the lord of the place to give him a flask or two of sound old Burgundy; ten minutes after he was back again. Two bottles were uncorked, and there being no glasses at hand, the Baron put them in turn to his mouth, draining each at a single draft.

Then he turned himself round with his face to the wall, and fell into a profound slumber.

CHAPTER 6

The Bedevilled Hair

THE huntsmen, being reassured with regard to their master's health, now went in search of the dogs, which had been left to carry on the chase alone. They were found lying asleep, the ground around them stained with blood. It was evident that they had run down the buck and eaten it; if any doubt on the matter remained, it was done away with by the sight of the antlers, and a portion of the jawbone, the only parts of the animal which they could not crunch up, and which had therefore not disappeared. In short, they were the only ones who had cause to be satisfied with the day's work. The huntsmen, after shutting up the hounds in Thibault's shed, seeing that their master was still sleeping, began to turn their thoughts to getting some supper. They laid hands on everything they could find in the poor wretch's cupboard, and roasted the goat, politely inviting Thibault to take a share in the meal toward the cost of which he had not a little contributed. He refused, giving as a plausible excuse the great agitation he still was under, owing to Marcotte's death and the Baron's accident.

He gathered up the fragments of his beloved drinking-cup, and seeing that it was useless to think of ever being able to put it together again, he began turning over in his mind what it might be possible for him to do, so as to free himself from the miserable existence which the events of the last two days had rendered more insupportable than ever. The first image that appeared to him was that of Agnelette. Like the beautiful angels that pass before the eyes of children in their dreams, he saw her figure, dressed all in white, with large white wings, floating across a blue sky. She seemed happy and beckoned to him to follow, saying the while, "Those who come with me will be very happy." But the only answer which Thibault vouchsafed to this charming vision was a movement of the head and shoulders, which interpreted, meant, "Yes, yes, Agnelette, I see you, and recognize you; yesterday, it would have been all very well to follow you; but today I am, like a king, the arbiter of life and death, and I am not the man to make foolish concessions to a love only born a day ago, and which has hardly learnt to stammer out its first words. To marry you, my poor child, far from lessening the bitter hardships of our lives, would only double or treble the burden under which we are both borne down. No, Agnelette, no! You would make a charming mistress; but, a wife—she must be in a position to bring money to support the household, equal in proportion to the power which I should contribute."

His conscience told him plainly that he was engaged to marry Agnelette; but he quieted it with the assurance that if he

broke the engagement, it would be for the good of that gentle creature.

"I am an upright man," he murmured to himself, "and it is my duty to sacrifice my personal pleasure to the welfare of the dear child. And more than that, she is sufficiently young and pretty and good, to find a better fate than what would await her as the wife of a plain sabot-maker."

And the end of all these fine reflections was, that Thibault felt himself bound to allow his foolish promises of the day before to melt away into air, and to forget the betrothal, of which the only witnesses had been the quivering leaves of the birch trees, and the pink blossom of the heather. It should be added that there was another mental vision, not wholly irresponsible for the resolution at which Thibault had arrived—the vision of a certain young widow, owner of the mill at Croyolles, a woman between twenty-six and twenty-eight, fresh and plump, with fine, rolling eyes, not devoid of mischief. Moreover, she was credibly supposed to be the richest match in all the countryside, for her mill was never idle, and so, for all reasons, as one can clearly see, it was the very thing for Thibault.

Formerly, it would never have occurred to Thibault to aspire to any one in the position of the rich and beautiful Madame Polet, for such was the name of the owner of the mill; and this will explain why her name is introduced here for the first time. And, in truth, it was the first time that she had ever occurred as a subject of serious consideration to our hero. He was astonished at himself for not having thought of her before, but then, as he said to himself, he *had* often thought about her, but without hope; while now, seeing that he was under the protection of the wolf, and that he had been endowed with a supernatural power, which he had already had occasion to exercise, it seemed to him an easy matter to get rid of all his rivals and achieve his purpose. True, there were evil tongues that spoke of the owner of the mill as having something of an ill temper and a hard heart; but the shoemaker came to the conclusion that, with the devil up his sleeve, he need not trouble himself about any wicked spirit, any petty little second-class demon that might find a corner in Widow Polet's disposition. And so, by the time the day broke, he had decided to go to Croyolles, for all these visions had of course visited him during the night.

The Lord of Vez awoke with the first song of the birds; he had entirely recovered from his indisposition of the day before, and woke up his followers with loud slashings of his whip. Having sent off Marcotte's body to Vez, he decided that he would not return home without having killed something, but that he would hunt the boar, just as if nothing out of the way had taken place on the previous day. At last, about six o'clock in the morning, they all went off, the Baron assuring Thibault that he was most grateful to him for the hospitality that he himself and his men and dogs had met with under his poor roof, in consideration of which he was quite willing, he swore, to forget all the grievances which he had against the shoemaker.

It will be easily guessed that Thibault experienced little regret at the departure of lord, dogs, and huntsmen. All these having at last disappeared, he stood a few moments contemplating his ransacked home, his empty cupboard, his broken furniture, his empty shed, the ground scattered with fragments of his belongings. But, as he told himself, all this was the ordinary thing to happen whenever one of the great lords went through a place, and the future, as it appeared to him, was far too brilliant to allow him to dwell long on this spec-

tacle. He dressed himself in his Sunday attire, smartening himself as best he could, ate his last bit of bread with the last morsel left of his goat, went to the spring and drank a large glass of water, and started off for Croyolles. Thibault was determined to try his fortune with Madame Polet before the day was over, and therefore set out about nine o'clock in the morning.

The shortest way to Croyolles was round by the rear of Oigny and Pisseleu. Now Thibault knew every in and out of the forest of Villers-Cotterets as well as any tailor knows the pockets he has made; why, therefore, did he take the Chrétiennelle track, seeing that it lengthened his journey by a good mile and a half? Reader, it was because this lane would bring him near to the spot where he had first seen Agnelette; for although practical considerations were carrying him in the direction of Croyolles Mill, his heart was drawing him toward Préciamont. And there, as fate would have it, just after crossing the road that runs to La Ferté-Milou, he came upon Agnelette, cutting grass by the wayside for her goats. He might easily have passed her without being seen, for her back was turned toward him; but the evil spirit prompted him, and he went straight up to her. She was stooping to cut the grass with her sickle, but hearing some one approaching she lifted her head, and blushed as she recognized that it was Thibault. With the blush a happy smile rose to her face, which showed that the rising color was not due to any feeling of hostility toward him.

"Ah! there you are," she said. "I dreamt much of you last night, and prayed many prayers for you also." And as she spoke, the vision of Agnelette passing along the sky, with the dress and wings of an angel, and her hands joined in supplication, as he had seen her the previous night, returned to him.

"And what made you dream of me and pray for me, my pretty child?" asked Thibault with as unconcerned an air as a young lord at court. Agnelette looked at him with her large eyes of heavenly blue.

"I dreamed of you, Thibault, because I love you," she said, "and I prayed for you, because I saw the accident that happened to the Baron and his huntsmen, and all the trouble that you were put to in consequence. . . . Ah! if I had been able to obey the dictates of my heart, I should have run to you at once to give you help."

"It is a pity you did not come; you would have found a merry company, I can tell you!"

"Oh! it was not for that I should have liked to be with you, but to be of use to you in receiving the Baron and his train. Oh! what a beautiful ring you have, Monsieur Thibault; where did you get it?"

And the girl pointed to the ring which had been given to Thibault by the wolf. Thibault felt his blood run cold. "This ring?" he said.

"Yes, that ring," and seeing that Thibault appeared unwilling to answer her, Agnelette turned her head aside, and sighed. "A present from some fine lady, I suppose," she said in a low voice.

"There you are mistaken, Agnelette," replied Thibault with all the assurance of a consummate liar. "It is our betrothal ring, the one I have bought to put on your finger the day we are married."

"Why not tell me the truth, Monsieur Thibault?" said Agnelette, shaking her head sadly.

"I am speaking the truth, Agnelette."

"No," and she shook her head more sadly than before.

"And what makes you think that I am telling a lie?"

"Because the ring is large enough to

go over two of my fingers." And Thibault's finger would certainly have made two of Agnelette's.

"If it is too large, Agnelette," he said, "we can have it made smaller."

"Good-bye, Monsieur Thibault."

"What! Good-bye?"

"Yes."

"You are going to leave me?"

"Yes, I am going."

"And why, Agnelette?"

"Because I do not love liars."

Thibault tried to think of some vow he could make to reassure Agnelette, but in vain.

"Listen," said Agnelette, with tears in her eyes, for it was not without a great effort of self-control that she was turning away, "if that ring is really meant for me——"

"Agnelette, I swear to you that it is."

"Well then, give it to me to keep till our wedding day, and on that day I will give it back to you, that you may have it blessed."

"I will give it you with all my heart," replied Thibault, "but I want to see it on your pretty hand. You were right in saying that it was too large for you, and I am going into Villers-Cotterets today; we will take the measure of your finger, and I will get Monsieur Dugué, the goldsmith there, to alter it for us."

The smile returned to Agnelette's face and her tears were dried up at once. She put out her little hand; Thibault took it between his own, turned it over and looked at it, first on the back and then on the palm, and stooping, kissed it.

"Oh!" said Agnelette, "you should not kiss my hand, Monsieur Thibault, it is not pretty enough."

"Give me something else, then, to kiss." And Agnelette lifted her face that he might kiss her on the forehead.

"And now," she said joyously, and with childish eagerness, "let me see the ring."

Thibault drew off the ring, and laughing, tried to put it on Agnelette's thumb; but, to his great astonishment, he could not get it over the joint. "Well, well," he exclaimed, "who would ever have thought such a thing?"

Agnelette began to laugh. "It is funny, isn't it!" she said.

Then Thibault tried to pass it over the first finger, but with the same result as when he put it on the thumb. He next tried the middle finger, but the ring seemed to grow smaller and smaller, as if fearing to sully this virgin hand; then the third finger, the same on which he wore it himself, but it was equally impossible to get it on. And as he made these vain attempts to fit the ring, Thibault felt Agnelette's hand trembling more and more violently within his own, while the sweat fell from his own brow, as if he were engaged in the most arduous work; there was something diabolic at the bottom of it, as he knew quite well. At last he came to the little finger and endeavored to pass the ring over it. This little finger, so small and transparent that the ring should have hung as loosely upon it as a bracelet on one of Thibault's, this little finger, in spite of all Agnelette's efforts, refused to pass through the ring. "Ah! my God, Monsieur Thibault!" cried the child, "what does this mean?"

"Ring of the Devil, return to the Devil!" cried Thibault, flinging the ring against a rock, in the hope that it would be broken. As it struck the rock, it emitted flame; then it rebounded, and in rebounding, fitted itself on to Thibault's finger. Agnelette, who saw this strange evolution of the ring, looked at Thibault in horrified amazement. "Well," he said, trying to brave it out, "what is the matter?"

Agnelette did not answer, but as she

continued to look at Thibault, her eyes grew more and more wild and frightened. Thibault could not think what she was looking at, but slowly lifting her hand and pointing with her finger at Thibault's head, she said, "Oh! Monsieur Thibault, Monsieur Thibault, what have you got there?"

"Where?" asked Thibault.

"There! there!" cried Agnelette, growing paler and paler.

"Well, but where?" cried the shoemaker, stamping with his foot. "Tell me what you see."

But instead of replying, Agnelette covered her face with her hands, and uttering a cry of terror, turned and fled with all her might.

Thibault, stunned by what had happened, did not even attempt to follow her; he stood rooted to the spot, unable to move or speak, as if thunderstruck.

WHAT had Agnelette seen that had alarmed her so? What was it that she pointed to with her finger? Had God branded him, as He branded the first murderer? And why not? Had not he, like Cain, killed a man? And in the last sermon he had heard at Oigny had not the preacher said that all men were brothers?

Thibault felt wild with misgivings; what had so terrified Agnelette? That he must find out without delay. At first he thought he would go into the town of Bourg-Fontaine and look at himself in a glass. But then, supposing the fatal mark was upon him, and others, besides Agnelette, were to see it! No, he must think of some other way of finding out. He could, of course, pull his hat over his brow, and run back to Oigny, where he had a fragment of mirror in which he could see himself; but Oigny was a long way off. Then he remembered that only a few paces from where he stood, there was a spring as transparent as crystal, which fed the pond near Baisemont, and those at Bourg; he would be able to see himself in that as clearly as in the finest mirror from Saint-Gobain.

So Thibault went to the side of the stream and, kneeling down, looked at himself. He saw the same eyes, the same nose, and the same mouth, and not even the slightest little mark upon the forehead—he drew a breath of relief. But still, there must have been something. Agnelette had certainly not taken fright for nothing. Thibault bent over closer to the crystal water; and now he saw there was something bright that shone amid the dark curls on his head and fell over his forehead. He leaned closer still—it was a red hair. A red hair, but of a most peculiar red—not sandy-colored or carroty; neither of a light shade nor a dark; but a red of the color of blood, with a brightness of the most vivid flame.

Without stopping to consider how a hair of such a phenomenal color could possibly have grown there, he began trying to pull it out. He drew forward the curl where gleamed the terrible red hair, that it might hang over the water, and then taking hold of it carefully between his finger and thumb gave it a violent pull; but the hair refused to come away. Thinking that he had not got sufficient hold of it, he tried another way, winding the hair round his finger and again giving it a vigorous jerk—the hair cut into his fingers but remained as firmly rooted as ever. Thibault then turned it round two of his fingers and pulled again; the hair lifted a little bit of his scalp, but as to moving, Thibault might as well have tried to move the oak that threw its shady branches across the stream.

Thibault began to think that he would do better to continue his walk to Croy-

olles; after all, as he remarked to himself, the questionable color of a single hair would hardly upset his plans of marriage. Nevertheless, the wretched hair caused him a great deal of worry; he could not get it out of his mind, it seemed to dance before his eyes, dazzling him like flames of running fire, until at last, out of all patience, he stamped his foot, exclaiming, "By all the devils in hell! I am not far from home yet, and I'll get the better of this confounded hair somehow."

Whereupon he set off running back toward his hut, went in and found his fragment of mirror, got hold of his hair again, seized a carpenter's chisel, placed it so as to cut off the hair as close to the head as possible, and keeping hair and tool in this position, leant over his bench, and dug the chisel down with as much force as possible. The tool cut deeply into the wood of the bench, but the hair remained intact. He tried the same plan again, only this time he armed himself with a mallet, which he swung over his head and brought down with redoubled blows on the handle of the chisel—but he was as far as ever from carrying out his purpose. He noticed, however, that there was a little notch in the sharp edge of the chisel, just the width of a hair. Thibault sighed; he understood now that this hair, the price he had paid in return for his wish, belonged to the black wolf, and he gave up all further attempts to get rid of it.

(To be continued next month)

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(Continued from page 148)

powerful *Hill Drums,* and that strange and oddly written story, *Black Man and White Witch.*"

Evelyn Martin, of Heltonville, Indiana, writes: "Where is Jules de Grandin? It's bad enough to leave him out of one issue, and much worse to leave him out of two together. If Seabury Quinn quit writing stories about Jules I would almost feel like quitting WEIRD TALES forever. Also, let's have more stories like *Light-Echoes,* by Everil Worrell. I like weird stories that are really weird. I also want to see more ghost stories, and what's more don't let your men be such cowards while the women seem unusually brave. I have actually felt as if I wanted to 'brain' some of your men. Are we to have no more of August W. Derleth? His short stories were always interesting." [We have a number of Mr. Derleth's stories on hand for forthcoming issues.—THE EDITORS.]

A letter from J. Wesley McCoombe, of Ambler, Pennsylvania, says: "I am pleased beyond words to find that I can once again purchase WEIRD TALES on the first of *every* month. I would be even more pleased if I could purchase it the first of every week. What has happened to the WEIRD TALES favorite author, Seabury Quinn? I miss his stories of the ghost-breaker. A copy of WEIRD TALES isn't complete unless I spend a half-hour with Jules de Grandin. I think the best story in the July issue is *Tam, Son of the Tiger,* by O. A. Kline, with *The Seeds of Death,* by David H. Keller, a close second. The one story of its type that I think you will never equal is *The Woman of the Wood.* I have forgotten the author's name, but I can never forget the story. Would it be possible to have it as a reprint? I have never read a more gripping tale of Chinese torture than *The Copper Bowl,* by Captain Eliot. Why don't you try to print more like it? Business may be bad, but I can always scrape up a quarter for W. T. each month. I wouldn't be without it at four times the price." [*The Woman of the Wood,* which appeared in WEIRD TALES for August, 1926, was written by A. Merritt. We expect to reprint it, and also *The Copper Bowl,* after a sufficient length of time has elapsed.—THE EDITORS.]

From Montreal writes E. de Winter: "Having traveled extensively and seen many odd, weird and unbelievable things, I find your magazine extremely interesting. Many of these stories I recognize as being based on authentic fact, and others on legends reaching from the dark ages. Your authors are experts in producing stories that are the quintessence of all that is outré, macabre and soul-chilling. I have not found in any other country anything so unique as WEIRD TALES, and have now been a continuous reader for three years, and intend to have you forward one each month when I return to Europe next year. I am very glad that you have decided to continue as a monthly magazine; my disappointment was very keen at the prospect of missing a month. I suggest your covers should be more suggestive of the truly weird and less crudely colored. Something in deep purples or green with livid yellows would be more mysterious. H. S. Whitehead writes in the best style of all your authors—good English, quiet and convincing. What about some more stories from the author of *The Copper Bowl?* And why not run a page for reader's personal weird experiences? 'Twould be interesting."

(Please turn to page 284)

COMING NEXT MONTH

"SO ENGLAND—was—again—barred—to—me. I—took—the—Viking—path—again——"

Athelstane's words trailed off. His hands slid limply from his lap and the whetstone and dirk dropped to the floor. His head fell forward on his broad chest and his eyes closed.

"Too much wine," muttered Turlogh. "But let him slumber; I'll keep watch."

Yet even as he spoke, the Gael was aware of a strange lassitude stealing over him. He lay back in the broad chair. His eyes felt heavy and sleep veiled his brain despite himself. And as he lay there, a strange nightmare vision came to him. One of the heavy hangings on the wall opposite the door swayed violently and from behind it slunk a fearful shape that crept slavering across the room. Turlogh watched it apathetically, aware that he was dreaming and at the some time wondering at the strangeness of the dream. The thing was grotesquely like a crooked gnarled man in shape, but its face was bestial. It bared yellow fangs as it lurched silently toward him, and from under penthouse brows small reddened eyes gleamed demoniacally. Yet there was something of the human in its countenance; it was neither ape nor man, but an unnatural creature horribly compounded of both.

Now the foul apparition halted before him, and as the gnarled fingers clutched his throat, Turlogh was suddenly and fearfully aware that this was no dream but a fiendish reality. With a burst of desperate effort he broke the unseen chains that held him and hurled himself from the chair. The grasping fingers missed his throat, but quick as he was, he could not elude the swift lunge of those hairy arms, and the next moment he was tumbling about the floor in a death grip with the monster, whose sinews felt like pliant steel. . . .

This powerful, heroic weird novelette will be a feature of the October issue of WEIRD TALES. Don't miss this thrilling tale:

The Gods of Bal-Sagoth

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

—ALSO—

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THE SHOT FROM SATURN
by Edmond Hamilton

An unusual weird tale replete with thrills and surprizes, about an attempted invasion of the earth by the planet Saturn.

SATAN'S CIRCUS
by Eleanor Smith

Strange horror lurked in the person of Madam Brandt, wife of the circus-owner—a grim, tragic tale.

OLD CITY OF JADE
by Thomas H. Knight

The story of a city hidden in the jungles of South America, where the inhabitants had been in a weird sleep for a thousand years.

These are some of the super-excellent stories that will appear in the next issue. Also, another thrilling installment of Otis Adelbert Kline's fast, moving story, *Tam, Son of the Tiger*, and Alexandre Dumas' exciting tale, *The Wolf-Leader*.

October WEIRD TALES Out September 1

(Continued from page 282)

"H. P. Lovecraft's *The Outsider* gets my vote for first place in the July issue of W. T., with *Black Man and White Witch* a close second," writes Mrs. Alma J. Wendell, of Windsor, Ontario. "Lovecraft just can't be beaten when it comes to the horror stuff. Please hurry and get our old friend Jules de Grandin back. He has been greatly missed in the last few issues."

S. B. Baker, of Fallbrook, California, writes to the Eyrie: "*Tam, Son of the Tiger* promises to be one of the best serials you have ever published. Many thanks for the reprint of *The Outsider,* which I have been hoping for for some time. Now can't we have a reprint of *The Eternal Conflict* by Nictzin Dyalhis, and also some more stories by that author? He is my favorite of your many fine writers." [We would welcome as much as you some excellent new stories by Nictzin Dyalhis, but we regret to say that we have none on hand at present. But hope springs eternal.—THE EDITORS.]

"You deserve congratulations for your selection of stories for the June-July issue," writes Robert Leonard Russell, of Mt. Vernon, Illinois. "It was the best issue published in a long time. *Tam, Son of the Tiger,* begins well. It is like a Tarzan story somewhat, but has a touch of a certain something which Burroughs lacks in his Tarzan books, much as I like them. Your reprint, *The Outsider,* is a masterpiece of weirdness, and ranks up with *The Hound, The Rats in the Walls* and *The Silver Key* by the same author."

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? The most popular stories in the June-July issue, as shown by your votes and letters, were the first part of Otis Adelbert Kline's strange novel, *Tam, Son of the Tiger,* and the reprint story, *The Outsider,* by H. P. Lovecraft. Not far behind these two in popularity was *The Seeds of Death,* by Doctor David H. Keller.

My Favorite Stories in the September Weird Tales Are:

Story	Remarks
(1)----------	----------
(2)----------	----------
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I do not like the following stories:

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The Footfalls Within

(Continued from page 159)

it had come, by a single blow of the staff of Solomon. Aye, the same staff, Kane knew, that in the hands of a mighty king and magician had ages ago driven the monster into that strange prison, to bide until ignorant hands loosed it again upon the world.

The old tales were true then, and King Solomon had in truth driven the demons westward and sealed them in strange places. Why had he let them live? Was human magic too weak in those dim days to more than subdue the devils? Kane shrugged his shoulders in wonderment. He knew nothing of magic, yet he had slain where that other Solomon had but imprisoned.

And Solomon Kane shuddered, for he had looked on Life that was not Life as he knew it, and had dealt and witnessed Death that was not Death as he knew it. Again the realization swept over him, as it had in the dust-haunted halls of Atlantean Negari, as it had in the abhorrent Hills of the Dead, as it had in Akaana—that human life was but one of a myriad forms of existence, that worlds existed within worlds, and that there was more than one plane of existence. The planet men call the earth spun on through the untold ages, Kane realized, and as it spun it spawned Life, and living things which wriggled about it as maggots are spawned in rot and corruption. Man was the dominant maggot now—why should he in his pride suppose that he and his adjuncts were the first maggots—or the last to rule a planet quick with unguessed life?

He shook his head, gazing in new wonder at the ancient gift of N'Longa, seeing in it at last, not merely a tool of black

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magic, but a sword of good and light against the powers of inhuman evil forever. And he was shaken with a strange reverence for it that was almost fear. Then he bent to the Thing at his feet, shuddering to feel its strange mass slip through his fingers like wisps of heavy fog. He thrust the staff beneath it and somehow lifted and levered the mass back into the mausoleum and shut the door.

Then he stood gazing down at the strangely mutilated body of Hassim, noting how it was smeared with foul slime and how it had alredy begun to decompose. He shuddered again, and suddenly a low timid voice aroused him from his somber cogitations. The slaves knelt beneath the trees and watched with great patient eyes. With a start he shook off his strange mood. He took from the moldering corpse his own pistols, dirk and rapier, making shift to wipe off the clinging foulness that was already flecking the steel with rust. He also took up a quantity of powder and shot dropped by the Arabs in their frantic flight. He knew they would return no more. They might die in their flight, or they might gain through the interminable leagues of jungle to the coast; but they would not turn back to dare the terror of that grisly glade.

Kane came to the black slaves and after some difficulty released them.

"Take up these weapons which the warriors dropped in their haste," said he, "and get you home. This is an evil place. Get ye back to your villages and when the next Arabs come, die in the ruins of your huts rather than be slaves."

Then they would have knelt and kissed his feet, but he, in much confusion, forbade them roughly. Then as they made preparations to go, one said to him: "Master, what of thee? Wilt thou not return with us? Thou shalt be our king!"

But Kane shook his head.

"I go eastward," said he. And so the tribespeople bowed to him and turned back on the long trail to their own homeland. And Kane shouldered the staff that had been the rod of the Pharaohs and of Moses and of Solomon and of nameless Atlantean kings behind them, and turned his face eastward, halting only for a single backward glance at the great mausoleum that other Solomon had built with strange arts so long ago, and which now loomed dark and forever silent against the stars.

The Golden Elixir

(Continued from page 169)

too-clever boy that I love. But I don't think the drug is anything like—opium or cocain or any of those horrid things, do you?" She shuddered. "Oh, what do you suppose is the explanation?"

I decided to count ten before answering. Should I tell her that—if John's unbelievable claim was actually true—she was in love with a headless man, a mere body uncontrolled by intellect? Should I tell her that when he changed into the amiability she desired it was because his real self had fled away from her and was wandering off on a vacation? It didn't seem a merciful thing to say.

"Where does he get this drug?" I countered.

"He makes it," said May. "One room of our house is fixed up like a laboratory. He mixes it up there."

"Then he must make it from a formula," I said. "Have you ever seen it?"

"Formula?" she repeated doubtfully; then, "Oh, yes. He makes it from a formula—I've noticed it. It is a slip of paper he carries around with him. It has a lot of queer figures on it, and letters with little numbers after them."

Her description suggested a solution to me.

"You say it has a *lot* of figures. Does it look very long and complex?"

"Very!" she said emphatically.

"Do you imagine he could remember them all if the paper disappeared?"

"I hardly think so," she replied. "It looks so tremendously complicated and difficult."

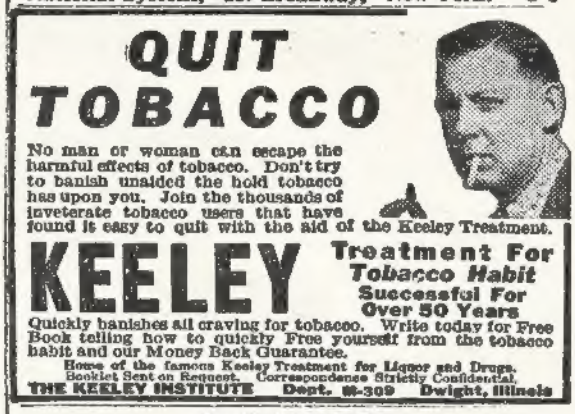
"Then you go home," I ordered, feeling my importance as benevolent adviser, "and get hold of that formula. Burn it—lose it—anything so he can't get his hands on it. I'll wager you can make his nature less changeable!"

She left, after thanking me for my official meddling in her marriage difficulties.

THE next and last act came to me from the newspapers. I read, a little while later, an account of the divorce of John and May Lancellar. It seems my advice was not so profound. . . .

Mrs. John Lancellar had applied for the divorce on the grounds of mental cruelty. Her husband was morose, lazy, and generally incompatible to her own society-loving nature.

Also there was repeated mention of a chemical formula. She explained to the court that her husband was an amateur chemist, and said she had destroyed a written slip containing the fruits of an experiment he seemed to think was vastly important. From that day on he had scarcely spoken to her, and the spells of placid amiability that had made him bearable before were no longer in evidence.



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NEXT MONTH

Old City of Jade

By THOMAS H. KNIGHT

A MOST unusual story is this—the tale of two aviators who landed in a strange city in the South American jungles, all of whose inhabitants were immersed in a weird sleep.

WHAT happened when the whirring propeller of the airplane stirred up the gas that had induced this strange slumber, and the inhabitants awoke to life after their thousand years of sleep, makes a story thrilling and exciting to an extreme. This fascinating tale will be published complete

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The divorce, unopposed by John, was granted.

With my mind in a whirl, I laid down the paper and stared at the chair opposite the window where John had sat as he told me of the golden elixir and its effects.

I myself, at the moment, was composed of two distinctly separate parts. One of me insisted with growing feebleness that the story was impossible, that it had grown out of a joke that had appealed to John so much that he had let it take possession of his mind as a fact. The other of me was not so sure. . . .

On an impulse I picked up the phone and was connected with the Moresby home. The butler informed me that Mr. John Lancellar had dined there on the evening of July eighteenth. He remembered the date because he had taken his position in the Moresby house just four days before that. At seven in the evening of July eighteenth, according to my desk calendar, John had sat in my room talking to me.

I phoned the Venetian Gardens and spoke to the head waiter there. He, methodical man, looked over his records and informed me that Mr. John Lancellar had reserved a table for dinner on July eleventh. He supposed Mr. Lancellar had filled the reservation; he couldn't remember that far back. At dinner time on July eleventh John had sat within twenty feet of me, describing his drug to me.

Of course, there is a chance that I might have gotten mixed in my dates. My desk calendar is often a day or so behind or ahead. . . .

The deuce! I don't know what to believe. But I do know that I'd give anything in the world if I had accepted his challenge to try to touch him on those evenings when he claimed his disembodied intelligence was conversing with me. Do you suppose my hand really would have passed through him?

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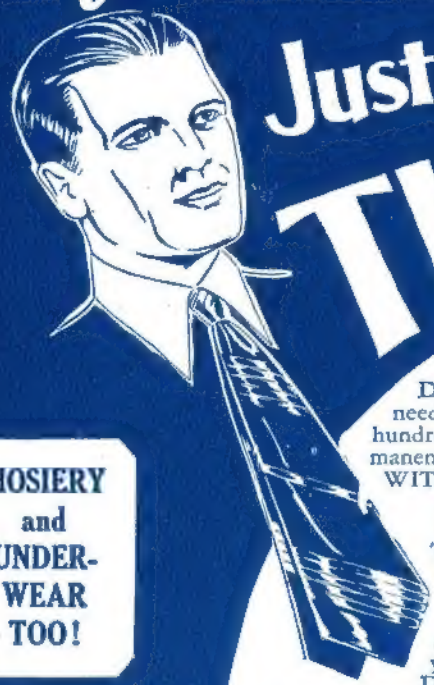

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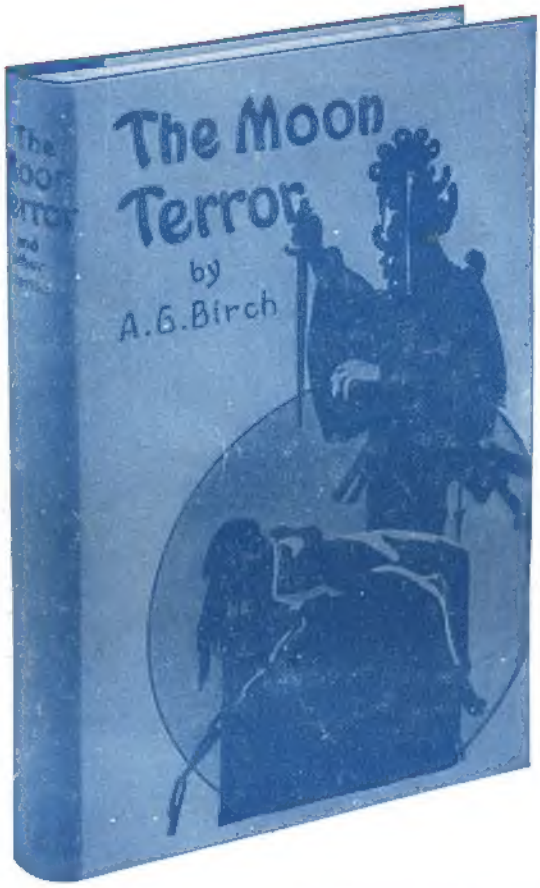

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